

BBC

APRIL 2015

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COUNTRYFILE

Spring to life!

Uplifting walks in **sparkling landscapes**

Plus nesting birds and hedgerow blossom

Britain's lost kings

In search of royal
remains hidden in
the countryside



WOOD WIZARD

Meet the man who
grows furniture

DAIRY HERO

Farmer of the Year's
solution to the milk crisis

EWE BEAUTY

Why do today's sheep
need makeovers?



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summer they are hand-picked and carefully sorted before being cooked in small batches to produce a fine conserve that is now enjoyed the world over. Try some for yourself and discover the sweet taste of our greengage conserve.



The preserve of good taste



Beautiful Loch Trool, as viewed from White Bannan in Galloway (page 18)

Springing to action



“One spring morning 12 years ago, I was driving a battered and unreliable campervan north up a horribly busy M6. For a road trip to see the countryside, I was spending an awful lot of time in city garages and then on motorways to catch up for lost time.

Then I turned left at Gretna on to the A75 and found myself on a beautiful open road. The traffic died away, a silver coast appeared to the south and hills began to rise ahead. And the van's engine serendipitously started to fire with a healthier rhythm. I spent the next week here in Dumfries and Galloway, pottering from serene lochs to relaxed villages and wildlife-rich woods to seabird-studded cliffs. The earlier lost time didn't exist. It remains the loveliest region I've ever visited in Britain.

Sara Maitland's beautiful piece about her Galloway homeland (page 18) reminded me of these wonders (plus how much I missed... and why on earth haven't I been back?). It made me itch to revisit the area – and reminded me how lucky we are to have Sara as one of our resident columnists (page 17).

Part of the joy of that Galloway trip was that it was in spring, when the land was leaping with life. We've tried to capture that throughout this issue – from great places to welcome in the new season (page 69) to discovering what our wildlife is up in the spring hedgerow (page 44), where Dominic Couzens entertainingly compares our native birds to builders and estate agents.

Spring had sprung – let's make the most of it!

Fergus

Fergus Collins, editor@countryfile.com

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THIS MONTH'S CONTRIBUTORS



Dominic Couzens

"It's spring, and everywhere birds are building, refurbishing or planning nests," says Dominic on **page 44**



Sara Maitland

"Its slightly secret-feeling location leads to some of its most endearing features," says Sara of her Galloway homeland, **page 17**



Neil Darwent

"Montbeliardes are easy to manage, fertile and give a good yield of milk, with fewer health issues," says the Farmer of the Year on **page 40**

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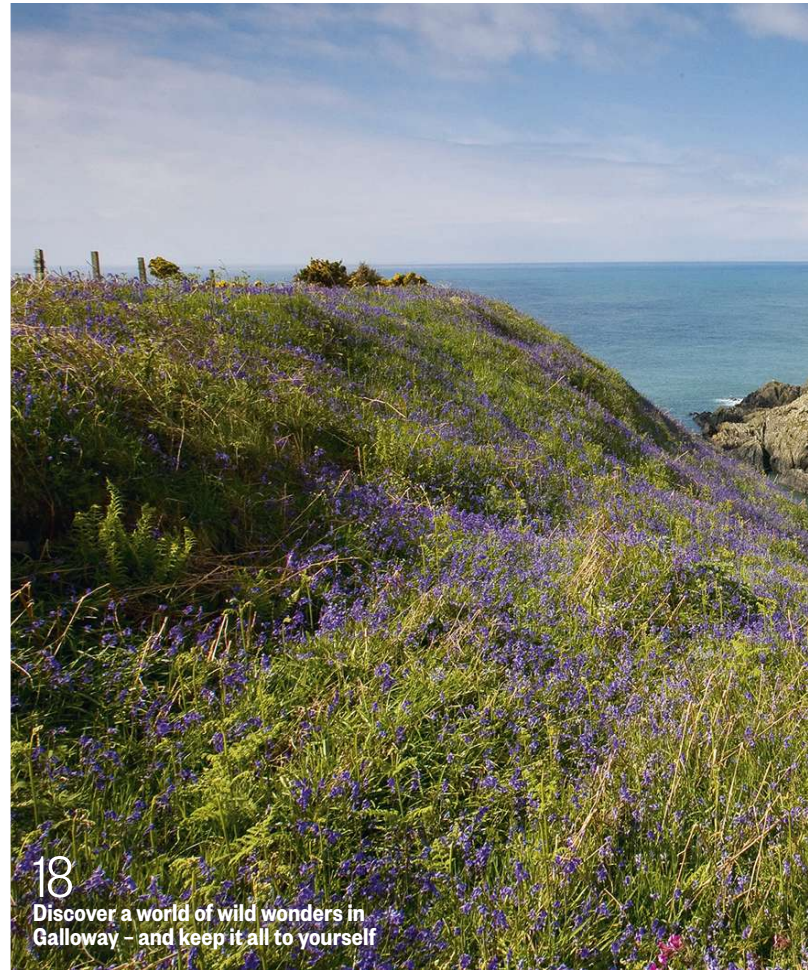
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Photos: FLPA, Getty, Oliver Edwards, Rosie Burnett, Alamy, Naturepl.com

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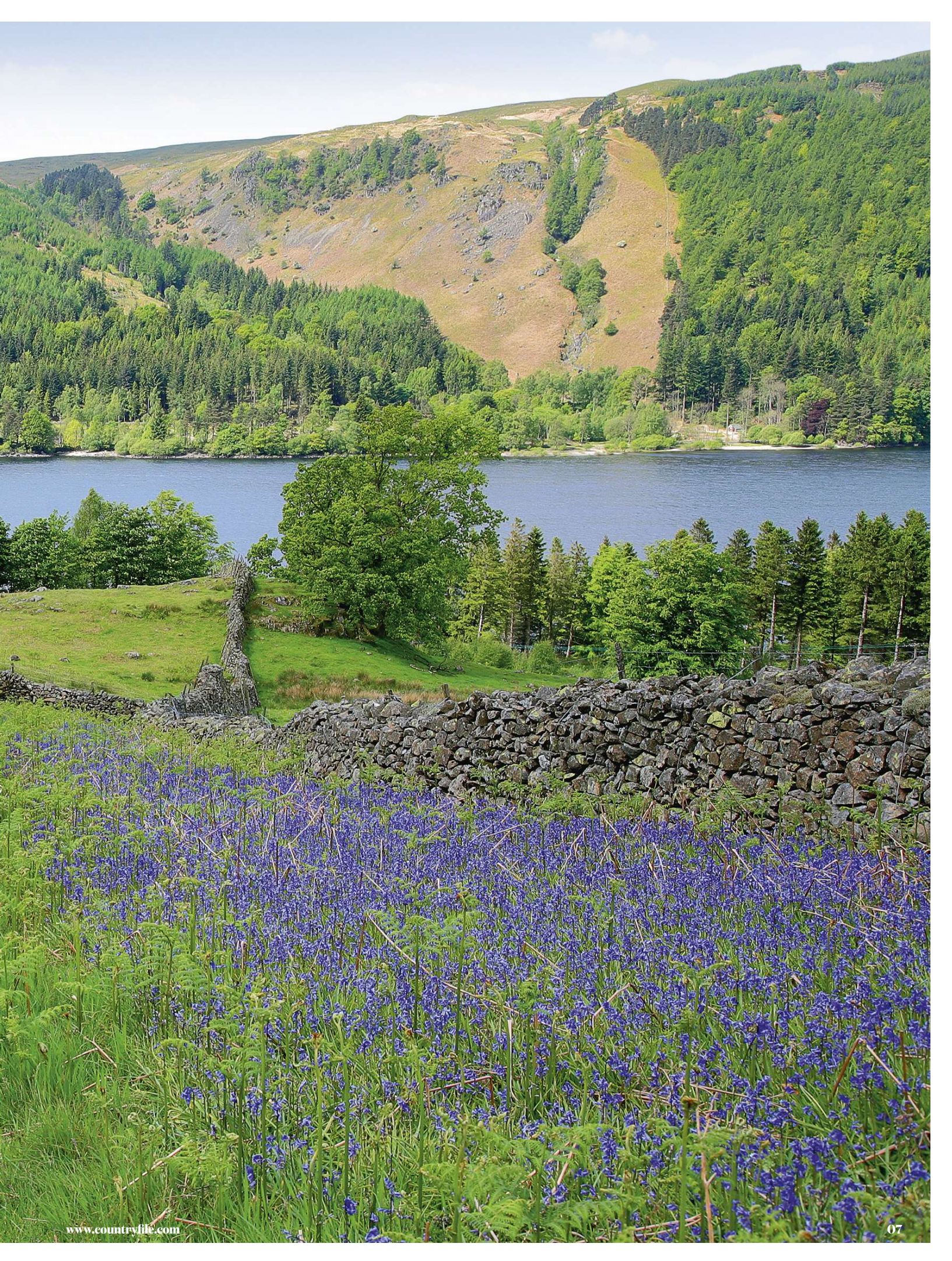
APRIL IN THE COUNTRY

PICTURES › NATURE › PEOPLE & PLACES › COUNTRY KNOW-HOW › FOOD

April view

TALES OF THIRLMERE

An enticing path leads through bluebells to the shores of a mere in the heart of the Lake District. It appears to be an entirely natural spring Lakeland scene – but not all is as it seems. For this is Thirlmere, a reservoir constructed in the 19th century to provide water for Manchester along a 96-mile-long aqueduct (one of the great uncelebrated manmade wonders of Britain). There was a huge opposition to the creation of Thirlmere, with social commentator John Ruskin leading the charge, saying something to the effect that Manchester should be put at the bottom of Thirlmere. Perhaps his views might soften today were he to be out walking along this path and among the woods planted around the shores.





▲ ST GEORGE'S DAY, 23 APRIL

Festivities to celebrate England's patron saint had waned since the 18th century, but have enjoyed a renaissance in recent years. Community-inspired events – such as the Salisbury pageant, with its origins in the 13th century, and Leicester's medieval reenactment – mark an increased interest in the occasion. At Leadenhall Market in the City of London (above), the legendary dragon-slayer is remembered with Morris dancing and other traditional English pastimes, such as pies and beer.

➤ CLOCK A CUCKOO

Arriving from West Africa this month, adult cuckoos only spend about 8-10 weeks in Britain, singing their two-tone calls – and finding foster parents for their young. Recent studies suggest that the cuckoo's sparrowhawk-like appearance keeps small birds at bay as it lays its eggs in their nests. The young cuckoos are then raised by 'foster-parent' species such as dunnocks and meadow pipits. Britain's cuckoo population has halved in the past 20 years.



We want to see your snaps

Send your countryside images to

photos@countryfile.com or the address on page 3





SPRING FOUNTAINS

By late April, ramsons (wild garlic) are in full flower – often sharing woodlands with the first bluebells. Here they swarm along the River Skell as it flows through the grounds of Fountains Abbey in North Yorkshire. The ancient ruins have seen 880 springs come and go but the new season still feels invigoratingly fresh here – and best enjoyed on a sunny day with a picnic on the riverbank, watching brown trout snaffle mayflies from the surface of the clear waters.



must
see

EASTER IN THE COUNTRYSIDE

Join in the Easter fun with quirky games and traditions that usher in the season, says Ian Vince

1



2



3



4



5

A long time before anyone even thought of making chocolate eggs for Easter – the first examples only date from the early 18th century – the egg has had a symbolic importance at this time of year. As a part of Easter (as well as the previous springtime celebrations that Easter supplanted), the egg is linked to rebirth, not only as the comparatively modern cipher for the process of salvation, resurrection and renewal, but also to the ancient gods that personified the landscape and the seasons' effects on it. But it's not just eggs – coconuts and beer barrels also feature at Easter in the countryside...

1 EGG ROLLING, 6 APRIL

An ancient tradition that sees decorated, hard-boiled eggs rolled down a steep hill, the object being to roll them the furthest. It takes place in a number of Lancashire towns, but one of the better-known events is at Avenham Park, Preston on Easter Monday. Chocolate eggs are rolled here, but traditional painted eggs are used elsewhere.

2 BOTTLE KICKING, 6 APRIL

This event at Hallaton in Leicestershire starts with a parade, followed by the distribution of a vast 'hare pie' – containing minced beef – to villagers. Then ensues a game of feral rugby with few rules (no eye-gouging, no strangling and no weapons) and goal posts a mile apart. The 'bottles' are 5kg beer kegs and the opponents are the next village. The game is so keenly fought, it often ends after nightfall.

3 EGG JARPING, 5 APRIL

Also known as egg pacqueing, picking or knocking, this is an Easter tradition with simple rules, similar to conkers, in which the pointed ends of hard-boiled eggs are pitted against one another until an eventual winner emerges. On Easter Sunday every year, the competition at the Hearts of Oak pub in Peterlee, Co Durham, results in a trophy for the new Egg Jarping World Champion.

4 HEDLEY BARREL RACE, 6 APRIL

A race between teams of three to carry an empty nine-gallon beer keg around a one-and-a-half mile course through the fields around Hedley on the Hill, Northumberland. The race begins at 1pm on Easter Monday and only takes 10 minutes, with the winning team receiving a full nine-gallon barrel of ale at the finish line by the Feathers Inn. A barbecue and games complete the festivities.

5 COCO-NUT DANCERS, BACUP, 4 APRIL

Some peculiarly attired Lancashire folk – affectionately referred to as the 'nutters' – dance from boundary to boundary of the town every Easter Saturday, no matter what the weather. Faces are blacked out, allegedly so the dancers won't be recognised by evil spirits. The tradition, which lasts from 9am to 8pm and features a few pub visits along the way, dates back to 18th-century Cornish miners who migrated to Bacup at that time.

wildlife spectacle of the month

Snake's head fritillaries

One of our most extraordinary-looking flowers is also now one of our scarcest, found only in a handful of water meadows in southern England when once it was relatively widespread. But when it does occur, such as in North Meadow just outside the Wiltshire town of Cricklade, it appears in huge numbers.

It's a flower that provides two distinct spectacles. From a distance, its sheer numbers create a purple hue across the meadow. Up close you can see how the scaly, drooping, tulip-like bloom gets its name. There is something beautifully reptilian about it. The flower occurs here because this meadow, at a confluence between the infant River Thames and its tributary the Churn, has never been ploughed, sprayed or fertilised. Indeed it has been managed in a traditional way through flooding, grazing and cutting for centuries – although in 2012 flooding meant that the hay couldn't be cut and the fritillaries could not force their way through in 2013.

Mid-April is the time to visit to see snake's head fritillaries – although the management system means that all kinds of wildflowers thrive here, so if you return in May and June, you'll still find yourself in a world of colour abuzz with insects and swallows. Why are such places so rare these days?

To see snake's head fritillaries:

1 North Meadow, Cricklade, Wiltshire

www.crickladeinbloom.co.uk/north_meadow.html

2 Iffley Meadows, Oxfordshire

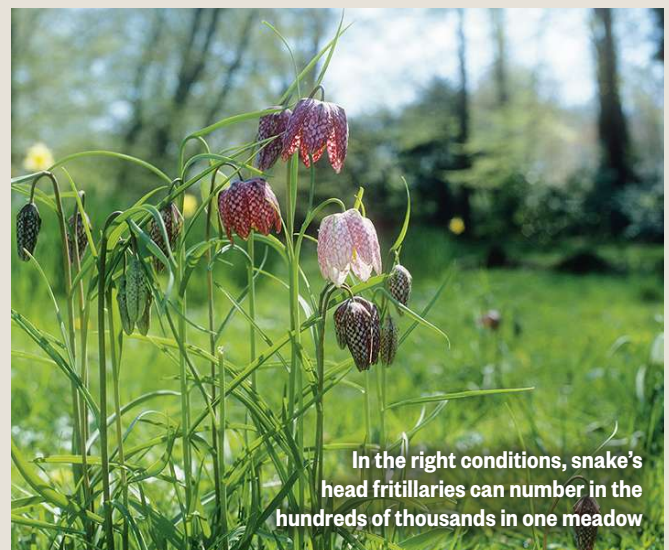
www.bbwt.org.uk/reserves/iffley-meadows

3 Fox Fritillary Meadow, Suffolk

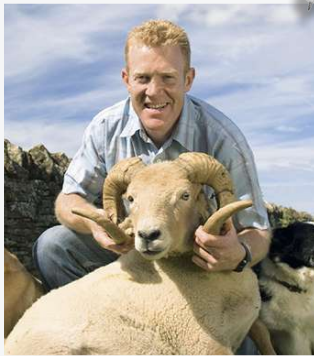
www.suffolkwildlifetrust.org/reserves/fox-fritillary-meadow

4 Magdalen College, Oxford

www.magd.ox.ac.uk/living-here/environment



In the right conditions, snake's head fritillaries can number in the hundreds of thousands in one meadow



Adam Henson

THE COUNTRY'S FAVOURITE FARMER GIVES US HIS
MONTHLY GUIDE TO AGRICULTURE IN BRITAIN

IT'S CALVING SEASON!

Early spring always means photos of newborn lambs all over the media. It seems that wobbly bundles of wool are irresistible to picture editors. But there's something equally photogenic taking place in the countryside. This is the time of year when large numbers of calves are born throughout the UK.

Cows are usually calved in the winter and spring. Many farmers avoid calving in the summer because the rate of grass growth reduces from July onwards. To help ensure the mothers and their calves get through the pregnancy safely, farmers monitor the health and size of the herd. The cows have to be the correct size for calving and the bull has to have the right genetics.

Throughout the pregnancy, keeping on top of nutrition is the secret to avoid losing a cow or its calf. Poor grass and forage is a worry, and cows that are too thin could lack the strength to push the calf out. But if the females are over-conditioned, fat deposits around the pelvis will

make the birth more difficult. For any farmer, the well-being of the cows and their offspring is paramount. They have invested time and energy in the farm, and each animal is a financial commitment. The livelihood of whole families can rely on the health of the livestock.

Despite the established image of cows living their entire lives on pasture, there are plenty of animals that are largely reared indoors. That doesn't mean they are at any disadvantage. There are strict rules about animal husbandry and Acts of Parliament that farmers have to abide by, such as the Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations. For example, cows calving indoors must be separated from other livestock, given a bedded and well-drained area where they can lie down, and must have plenty of space for a vet or farmer to attend to them.

• For more on cows and dairy farming, see our special report on milk, page 38.

Ask Adam: What topic would you like to know more about? Email your suggestions to editor@countryfile.com



FOUR COMMON SPECIES YOU'LL SEE IN THE MODERN COUNTRYSIDE

1. HOLSTEIN FRIESIAN

Ask any school pupil to draw a cow and the chances are it will be a Holstein Friesian. The familiar black and white pattern belongs to the most popular dairy breed in the country. Their incredible milk yields are the key to their success.

2. GUERNSEY

These beautiful, docile animals have a worldwide reputation for their rich and creamy milk, which has earned them the nickname the 'Golden Guernsey'. Today, there's a big demand for butter and ice cream made from Guernsey milk.

3. CHAROLAIS

If you see a herd of strong, creamy white cattle in a field, they're likely be Charolais. It was the first continental breed to be imported in to the UK in the 1950s and the superiority of the bulls quickly made them popular with beef breeders.

4. LIMOUSIN

These beautiful golden-red cattle make up about 25% of the entire national beef herd, but the first Limousins weren't imported to the UK until 1971. The bulls are sturdy and fertile; the cows are hardy and good milkers.

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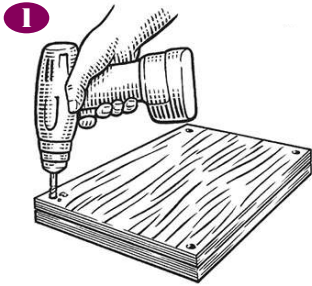
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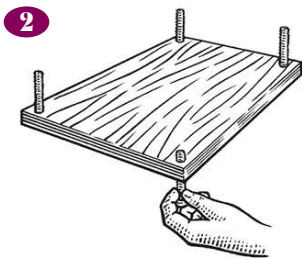
how to...

MAKE A FLOWER PRESS

How to hang on to those beautiful blooms for much longer



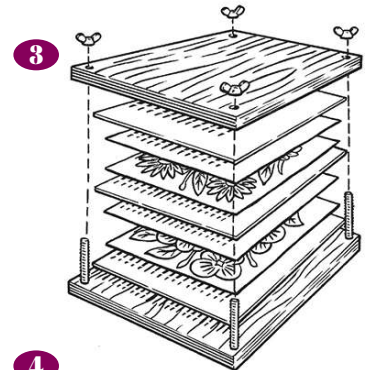
1 Cut two pieces of stout but thin ply wood 20x30cm. Drill holes large enough for bolts in the four corners. Stack both pieces when you do this so that the holes are aligned.



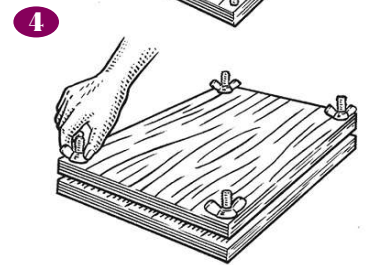
2 Slide bolts through the holes in the bottom piece of plywood.

3 When you are ready to press flowers, place a layer of cardboard and a layer of blotting paper on the

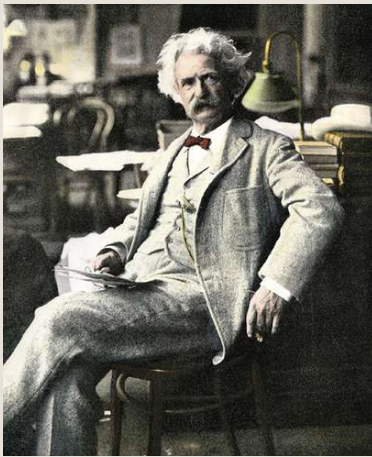
bottom of the press. Now add flowers, leaving enough space around them to dry properly. Cover with a layer of blotting paper, then card. You can add many layers of flowers, blotting paper and card in one go.



4 When finished, carefully fit the top piece of the press over the bolts and use wingnuts to tighten it. Store in a dry place in the house. Leave for some time – up to four weeks is recommended.



Quote



“The first of April is the day we remember what we are the other 364 days of the year”

Mark Twain

Heritage

Heffle Cuckoo Fair

One of Britain's longest-running festivals returns to the market town of Heathfield, East Sussex on 18 April.

Celebrating the arrival of spring, the festival, which began in 1315, recreates the legend of Dame Heffle who would release a cuckoo from her basket. It was said the bird “flies up England carrying warmer days with him”.

Traditional scarecrows, made by festival-goers, are entered into an annual competition and marshall the streets, alongside stalls of tempting treats, morris dancers and an old-fashioned fun fair – with all money raised going to a local charity.

For more information, visit www.hefflecuckoofair.org.uk.



Colourful scarecrows are entered into Heathfield's annual competition

Illustration: Alan Bailey.
Photos: Alamy, Stockfood



go
foraging

MAKE DANDELION WINE

Use these bright meadow flowers to create an intriguing country beverage

Fields and roadside margins are bursting with tiny suns this month – dandelion flowers. If you take a close look, you'll see that they are exceptionally beautiful – a flower arranger's dream – if only they weren't deemed weeds. Alas, they are usually overlooked, particularly as an ingredient in wine-making. But it's worth having a go at creating this amber nectar. First, gather a carrier bag full of heads, but avoid the stalks – you just want the petals.

Put them in a fermenting vessel with 450g of chopped sultanas, 250ml of freshly brewed tea, 700g sugar and 5ml citric acid. Pour on 7l of boiling water. Stir to dissolve the

sugar, leave to cool to about 18-20°C then add a sachet of wine yeast. Grate the rind of two oranges into the mix, and their juice (strain this before adding). Stir, cover with a tight lid and leave for 9-10 days.

Strain out the solids through fine muslin, return the liquid to the bucket and leave for a further 5-6 days. After this, siphon into a 5-litre demijon, leaving as much of the deposit behind as possible. If it is not full, top up with cooled, boiled water. Fit an airlock and leave in a warm place to ferment. Once the air has stopped bubbling through the airlock, it's ready to bottle. Leave for six months before tasting!



Weather watch

with John Hammond

It shouldn't be surprising – after all, it happens every year. Who among us, though, doesn't pause in awe at the transformation that's now taking place in our landscape? From grey to green, this month, above all others, holds witness to the reassuring, unfailing cycle of rebirth.

Longer days and higher temperatures largely govern the speed at which spring progresses. In warm years, when the mercury has made an early, unexpected dart into the 70s, I've known the horse chestnut to be in full leaf by mid-month.

Sometimes, however, held back by persistent wintry northeast winds, the hedgerows can appear lifeless and drab, even as May approaches. Different species of fauna and flora emerge according to their own specific triggers. Like the tortoise and the hare, they will arrive at summer in their own good time.

As we know, the dash of the hare can sometimes be too hasty. In April 1981, those horse chestnuts were indeed in full leaf when a late snowstorm swept the heart of the UK. A foot of snow on the 25th cut many a bough down to size. The early swallows must have considered turning round and heading back to Africa that year.

TS Eliot recognised this when he observed: "April is the cruellest month." Somehow, though, nature recovers from such setbacks. The dazzling rape fields now whet the appetite for the golden months that lie ahead.



Watch weatherman
John Hammond on
BBC News and *Countryfile*.

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OPINION

Sara Maitland

Beauty treatments are now a key part of preparing livestock for the market

Illustration: Lynn Hatzius

“Usually, someone asking ‘does my bum look big in this?’ hopes for the answer ‘no’. But not in the case of Airyolland Nisha, who had just spent nearly half an hour in the hands of her beautician – she wanted a resounding ‘yes’.”

BEAUTY SHEEP

This is because she is a Beltex sheep being prepared for the in-lamb ewe sale in Carlisle just before Christmas. Her beautician Eric Loughridge (who is more properly called a dresser, just as a cow beautician is called a fitter), had come over from Ireland with the explicit intention of making her and her 10 companions’ ‘bums look big’ by delicately carving her fleece.

Beltex are a relatively new breed, first coming to the UK in the 1980s and bred specifically to have hefty, meaty backsides. Nisha has had her tail trimmed to emphasise her fine bones and a wash and blow-dry (yes, there is a huge fan dryer in the barn).

Because she is in lamb – and has been scanned to prove it – she will not be pressured by having a facial or any too extensive going-over, although at other times of year and for different sheep this would be standard. A Beltex wants to look as chubby as possible, but Mule ewes (crosses of Blackface or Swaledale sheep with Bluefaced Leicesters) are bred to lamb well, so they will be dressed to make them look maternal, or ‘milky’ as someone put it.



DRESSING THE PART

Airyolland Nisha has all the documents to prove her breeding and health, so what is this styling of stock about? It is not about deceiving or cheating the buyers – everyone does it. It is an entirely open process with dressers advertising on-line, and dressing benches and other artefacts commercially available.

No one pretends they are not doing it, and they are often not even trying to persuade the buyer that this is natural: no one believes that sheep come marmalade orange in the light of nature – never mind other even more exotic colours that can be seen – but dying them before market is a standard practice.

No one supposes the hair along the topline of most cows’ backs stands up like a mohican of its own accord. It’s held in place with gel and there are instructions on the web about how to do it.



Sara Maitland is a writer who lives in Dumfries and Galloway. Her works include *A Book of Silence* and *Gossip from the Forest*.

CAREFUL PRESENTATION

However, in a competitive market it is about influencing buyers. In this sense, it is just the same as packaging any other product – market research has taught washing-powder makers and car salesmen that look is as important (if not more) than price. Interestingly, one of the most important ‘influences’ is that farmers like to buy animals they can see have been well cared for.

So making a fuss and turning your stock out looking its best is a visual, public way of demonstrating care.

Airyolland Nisha did very well indeed for a four-crop ewe at the sale, fetching 820 guineas (a guinea is worth £1.05 – and they are still used in stock auctions). So, obviously, the dressing paid off, in the crude financial sense – though only in addition to her good breeding and her seller’s high reputation. When I rang her owners, Neale and Janet McQuistin of Airyolland Farm, to confirm the details, Janet said it had been a great sale – all the ewes had “gone to good homes”.

Dressing and fitting, though seldom thought about outside farming, seems to me a lovely example of the odd mixture of hard-nosed commerce and good husbandry, good care, that marks agricultural best practice.

”

“Have your say What do you think about the issues raised here? Write to the address on page 3 or email editor@countryfile.com



SILENT GALLOWAY

Soulful forests, shimmering lochs, raw wilderness
and unbroken peace – a quietly staggering beauty
lies in these hills, says **Sara Maitland**

Spectacular Loch Trool in the
heart of Galloway Forest Park
– you can circumnavigate the loch
on the Glentrool Trail





“WALKERS ARE QUIETER AND THE SOLITUDE IS OFTEN UNBROKEN ALL DAY”

ABOVE Rockcliffe on the Solway Firth looks out to Rough Island and the Lake District

BONNY GARDENS

Warmed by the Gulf Stream, but protected from Atlantic storms by Northern Ireland, Galloway enjoys a mild climate of its own. The price of this is more rain than one might choose, but it leads to wonderful gardens. The jewel in the crown is **Logan Botanic Garden** (below) down the Rhins, a subsidiary of the Edinburgh Royal Botanic Garden. Open from 15 March to 31 October, it specialises in plants that can rarely be seen elsewhere (many from the southern hemisphere). There are forests of tree ferns, gunnera so huge there is an adult-height path under the leaves, eucalyptus, palm trees, rare rhododendrons and meconopsis planted in with a huge range of natives. This lovely serene walled garden also has a carp pond and a range of woodland walks.

Other choices include **Castle Kennedy Gardens**; **Glenwhan**, above Dunragit, especially when the rhododendrons are flowering; **Cally Gardens** at Gatehouse and **Galloway House** at Sorbie.



When they hear where I live, there is a tendency for people to say “Err... where IS Galloway?” My father, who was something of a tease, would reply, “On the south coast of Scotland.” Although not very helpful, this is completely accurate. The Solway Firth runs between the Lake District and Scotland, but its northern shore sticks out to the west over 60 miles beyond the top corner of Cumbria. From the Galloway coast, there are open views down the Irish Sea to the Isle of Man. A clearer way to describe it is to say you cross the border north of Carlisle and turn left. The A75 runs for 100 miles westward across Galloway to Stranraer.

NO MAN’S LAND

Another reason why people are not clear where Galloway lies is because, from the mid-14th century until 1975, it had no official existence. After the ancient Kingdom of Galloway – oriented towards Ireland, the sea and the Kingdom of the Isles – was absorbed into Scotland, the area was divided in half; into the county of Wigtownshire and, uniquely, the Stewartry of Kirkcudbright. (Never say “Kirkcudbrightshire”. If you are nervous about the pronunciation – kur-coo-bri – say “The Stewartry”.) In 1975, when Scotland was regionalised, the two were reamalgamated and joined with Dumfriesshire, and the whole area is now a unitary authority, Dumfries and Galloway.

But its slightly secret-feeling location has led to some of its most endearing features. To start with, it has a very small population density – 23.1 per square kilometre (60 per square mile) for Dumfries and Galloway as

a whole against an average of more than 400 in England. Moreover, the vast majority live in Dumfriesshire, making Galloway even emptier. While the population of the UK as a whole has multiplied by about six since 1800, Galloway’s has very nearly flatlined. This is not an unmixed blessing for its inhabitants but it is a precious gift to visitors.

BRIGHT STAR

There is only one town – **Stranraer** – with over 5,000 inhabitants, almost no industrial development or traffic and a wonderful sense of space and freedom. It has the lowest crime rate in Britain and a strong tradition of community involvement. Above all it has the richest, most complex, interwoven relationship of natural history and social history: Neolithic standing stones, magical ancient woodland, the oldest Christian site in Scotland, one of the more flourishing colonies of red squirrels, medieval abbeys, organic farms, the high wildness of the Galloway Hills, a coastline so lovely that it is one of the five short-listed sites for Scotland’s first coastal and marine national park (a scheme that awaits happier economic times) and a vibrant circle of craft workers, artists and writers.

I find it symbolic of Galloway’s modesty that, although the Galloway Hills are a fierce mountainous wilderness, the **Merrick** – the highest peak – shyly stops just short (less than 250ft short) of being a Munro. There are no ‘baggers’ but quieter, more peaceful walkers and the solitude is often unbroken all day.

Galloway knows its own worth – it couples a gentle independence of spirit with some impressive international accolades. It was



The Saugh Burn babbles
beneath Galloway's highest
peak, the Merrick, which
stands at 843m (2,766 feet)



The village of Portpatrick on the Solway coast. The coastline benefits from a pleasant climate, due to the flow of the Gulf Stream

TOP Known as “the Highlands of the Lowlands”, Galloway Forest Park is Britain’s largest forest park at 300 square miles **BELOW LEFT** A wild feral goat eats spring bluebells in the reserve’s Wild Goat Park **BELOW RIGHT** The forest park is also home to a colony of rare and elusive pine martens

the first location in the UK to be awarded Dark Sky Park status by the International Dark Sky Association in 2009 – the spangled band of the Milky Way is clearly visible on any cloud-free night. More recently the area has achieved UNESCO’s Biosphere accreditation, another first in Scotland, which speaks not simply to the natural beauty of an area but to the local population’s engagement with it and its conservation and sustainable development.

SOUTH TO THE SEA

And once you know where it is, Galloway is very accessible – weekendable, even – from southern England. The A75 rather neatly divides the district. South of it is the coastal area, with sweet green dairy farms, much of the historical and cultural heritage, what small towns there are, and a coast of small cliffs and rocky edges but also sandy beaches, sweeping tides and little ancient harbours. **Portpatrick** in the furthest west was the old route to Ireland that John Keats used in 1818. There are seals and once, looking down from a cliff path, a friend and I grumbled bitterly about people dumping black plastic bags in the water, before we realised we were watching the rolling passage of porpoises.

Three peninsulas push down into the Irish Sea, longer and narrower as you move westward: **Borgue**, which is a National Scenic Area (the Scottish equivalent of an AONB); the **Machars** where Ninian founded the first Christian Church in Scotland at **Whithorn**; and the **Rhins**, with the **Mull of Galloway**, a notable RSPB seabird reserve, at the very bottom.

All three are well worth exploring. In particular this is bird-watching country; there are several reserves, a gannetry out at sea on the aptly named **Scares Rocks** and great flocks of wintering geese on the merses. For those less ornithologically inclined, there are excellent gardens, fine Bronze Age remains – including the distinctive and complete stone circle at **Torhouse** – several ruined castles and, at **Wigtown**, the largest second-hand bookshop in Scotland.



“AT THE HEART OF THE FOREST ARE THE GALLOWAY HILLS, A VAST ROUGH WILDERNESS”

NORTH TO THE ‘NOTHING’ FOREST

But, for me at least, it is north of the A75 that the real adventures begin. **Galloway Forest Park** covers 300 square miles of “nothing”, as a benighted friend of mine put it. A nothing that includes feral goats, red deer, black grouse, spectacular peat flows, red squirrel, golden eagles, little isolated lochs, weird rock formations (such as the Devil’s Bowling Green near **Dungeon Hill**) and, although you almost certainly will not see them, a colony of pine martens, now being tenderly encouraged with denning boxes, because research suggests they in their turn keep down incursions by grey squirrels.

At the heart of the forest are the **Galloway Hills**, a vast rough wilderness ringed by Forestry Commission plantations. The Dark Sky Park maps loosely onto the park but spreads its influence more widely. I find it tragic to think how many children are growing up without seeing the glory that we see here every clear night – one of the night walks for beginners at Kirroughtree would be a perfect gift for an urban 12-year-old.

The park has three visitors centres: **Kirroughtree** just off the A75 a couple of miles east of Newton Stewart (where you can also hire mountain bikes and try one



ABOVE Bruce's Stone overlooking Loch Trool, commemorating Robert the Bruce's victory over English forces **BELOW** Look out for small pearl-bordered fritillaries in Buchan Wood

EARLY CHRISTIANITY

Around 400 AD, just as the Romans were pulling out of their northernmost province of Britain, Ninian founded the first Christian Church in Scotland. Bede, in the 8th century, described his Candida Casa – 'shining white house' – in Whithorn in the Machars. Later, the site became a cathedral and an important pilgrimage site in the Middle Ages – visited by Robert the Bruce, King James IV and large numbers of pilgrims from Scotland, Northern England and Ireland. The pilgrimage routes have marked the landscape: the late-12th century Cistercian Abbey at Glenluce (below) was probably founded principally to succour pilgrims coming from the north. The 24 miles of the pilgrims' route from Glenluce to Whithorn is now waymarked for both walkers and cyclists. Up in the hills, on the Southern Upland Way, is a strange curiosity: two Bronze Age standing stones (once a circle of 14) are carved with 8th-century crosses – graffiti by early pilgrims.



of the 7stanes routes); **Clatteringshaws**, high up on the A712 west of New Galloway; and my favourite, **Glentrool**.

The best way to get to Glentrool is from Newton Stewart up the little road through Minnigaff and along the east bank of the river Cree. There is an early treat, if you are lucky: just as you pass the last houses, look to your right towards the forest line and you may see a white hart of medieval romance. In the 19th century, the local laird imported white fallow deer to his ornamental deer park – they're still there, and heart-stopping.

The road then runs through the largest area of ancient woodland in southern Scotland, all bluebells and beauty in springtime, with waterfalls tumbling down the steep banks and the Cree running sweetly below. There's an RSPB reserve and a lovely sheet of water where otters cavort. I'm told there's a good chance of seeing otters from the platform here, especially at dawn or late evening. Sadly I never see otters, although they are flourishing throughout the region. I suspect they are, not unreasonably, punishing me for my childhood delight in otter hunting – a shocking confession nowadays.

"THE DEEP GREEN MAGIC OF TRUE ANCIENT WOODLAND, THE SOURCE OF ALL OUR FAIRYTALES"

A STONE'S THROW FROM PARADISE

Eventually the road comes to the Glentrool visitor centre at the **Stroan Bridge**, which offers some fine waymarked walks and off-road biking trails a good information booth and a café with first-class fresh baking. But I suggest keeping this until tea-time. Instead push on up the road, to a second car park, and a couple of hundred yards further to a tiny third one, which is occasionally full.

Walk up to the nearby **Bruce's Stone** – and enter paradise. The long narrow glacier-carved **Loch Trool** shimmers below you, across the water is the site of Robert the Bruce's first, history-changing victory over the English; above you loom the huge hills (the path up the Merrick starts here) and, perhaps best of all, you are looking over the **Buchan Wood**, said to be the least spoiled ancient oak wood in Britain. Right there, not quarter of a mile from your car, with a good track and infinite delights – waterfalls, cow wheat, breeding goosanders, rare mosses, sundew, small pearl-bordered fritillaries, fungi, dippers... and... and... and the deep green magic of true ancient woodland, the source of all our fairytales.

You can walk from here, on a path round the loch (using part of the Southern Upland Way) or up into the hills, or potter in the wood – when it is warm enough I bathe in the **Buchan Burn** in a deep hidden pool below the track – and look, watch, wait. The peace and wonder of it will get to you soon enough.



Sara Maitland is an author and regular columnist for *BBC Countryfile Magazine*. Her works include *Daughter of Jerusalem*, *A Book of Silence* and *Gossip from the Forest*.

Photos: Alamy, Naturepl.com

A cascade of three waterfalls
on the Buchan Burn among the
ancient oaks of Buchan Wood

NOW GO THERE ➤

Sara Maitland on the best places to stay, local treats and unmissable sights...

MAPPED OUT

- 1 Corsewall Lighthouse Hotel
- 2 The Steam Packet Inn
- 3 Cream O'Galloway
- 4 Cairn Holy Chambered Cairns
- 5 House O'Hill
- 6 Knockinaan Lodge
- 7 The Crown
- 8 St Ninian's Cave
- 9 Wood of Cree
- 10 Rhinns of Kells



WHERE TO STAY

Corsewall Lighthouse Hotel

A genuine retired (and converted) lighthouse on a rocky shore with spectacular views over the Irish Sea to Ailsa Craig, Arran and The Mull of Kintyre. Good restaurant, too.

www.lighthousehotel.co.uk

The Steam Packet Inn

Right on the harbour in Isle of Whithorn. The bedrooms are over the popular bar and restaurant, so might be noisy sometimes, but the harbour is delightful and the atmosphere warm-hearted.

www.thesteampacketinn.biz

Self-catering

There is an excellent range, often in very rural locations, with many welcoming short stays and pets. Children can be safe and free.

www.discoverscotland.net



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www.creamogalloway.co.uk



RAINY DAY

Cairn Holy Chambered Cairns (DG8 7EA – brown sign off the A75 between Gatehouse and Carsluith.) This magical little Neolithic stone site sits a mile up a tiny lane, with free parking. The stones are atmospheric and look out over the most enormous sea view, with the Machars and Rhins and Ireland on the horizon.



House o' Hill



Crown Hotel, Portpatrick

PLACES TO EAT

BUDGET

Crown Hotel, Portpatrick

Right on the little esplanade, overlooking the harbour, this prize-winning pub and hotel offers excellent meals (fish is the speciality).

www.crownportpatrick.com

MID-RANGE

House o' Hill

This lovely traditional travellers inn in Glentworth could also fall under the where-to-stay category, but it wins the places-to-eat listing because of imaginative cooking, exemplary local sourcing,

consistently friendly service and a lovely relaxed dining room. It's also the only licensed premises in the Forest Park.

www.houseohill.co.uk

BLOWOUT

Knockinaam Lodge

A seriously fine hotel and restaurant with a Michelin star, set in a spectacular location south of Portpatrick. Churchill and Eisenhower held a secret meeting here to discuss D-Day plans, and it also features in Buchan's *The Thirty-Nine Steps*.

www.knockinaamlodge.com

3 GREAT WALKS

St Ninian's Cave

Two miles south-west of Whithorn. Park at Kildale Farm and head down an enchanted woodland glade to a pebble beach under flowering cliffs. At the north end is Ninian's retreat, featuring early carvings and contemporary driftwood crosses. At the south end, a small path leads up onto the cliff top to extend the walk to Isle of Whithorn.

Wood of Cree

This RSPB reserve in fairytale ancient oak woods is five miles north of Newton Stewart. The 2.5 mile circular path is steep in places and sometimes muddy, with magnificent waterfall and magical crashing burn, bluebells, bats, butterflies and – of course – birds: pied flycatchers, willow tits, redstarts (and more). Possibly my favourite short walk anywhere, especially if you can get there by 5.30am in May for the thrilling dawn chorus.

Rhinn's of Kells

Glorious ridge walk. From the castle on Loch Doon, follow a track round the bottom of the loch and up the other side. When the trees thin out, strike up hill – after a stiff climb you will be on a long high ridge with short grass and infinite, dream-like views. Follow the ridge southwards, across a rising line of summits: the Meaul, Carlin's Cairn and finally Corserine (814m). Between these last two is a burn: follow it down to re-enter the forestry and then take a rough track back to the loch-side. It's a tough 15 or so miles of unpathed high hill-walking – and you'll need a map (OS Explorer 318).



Rhinn's of Kells, walking up Corserine

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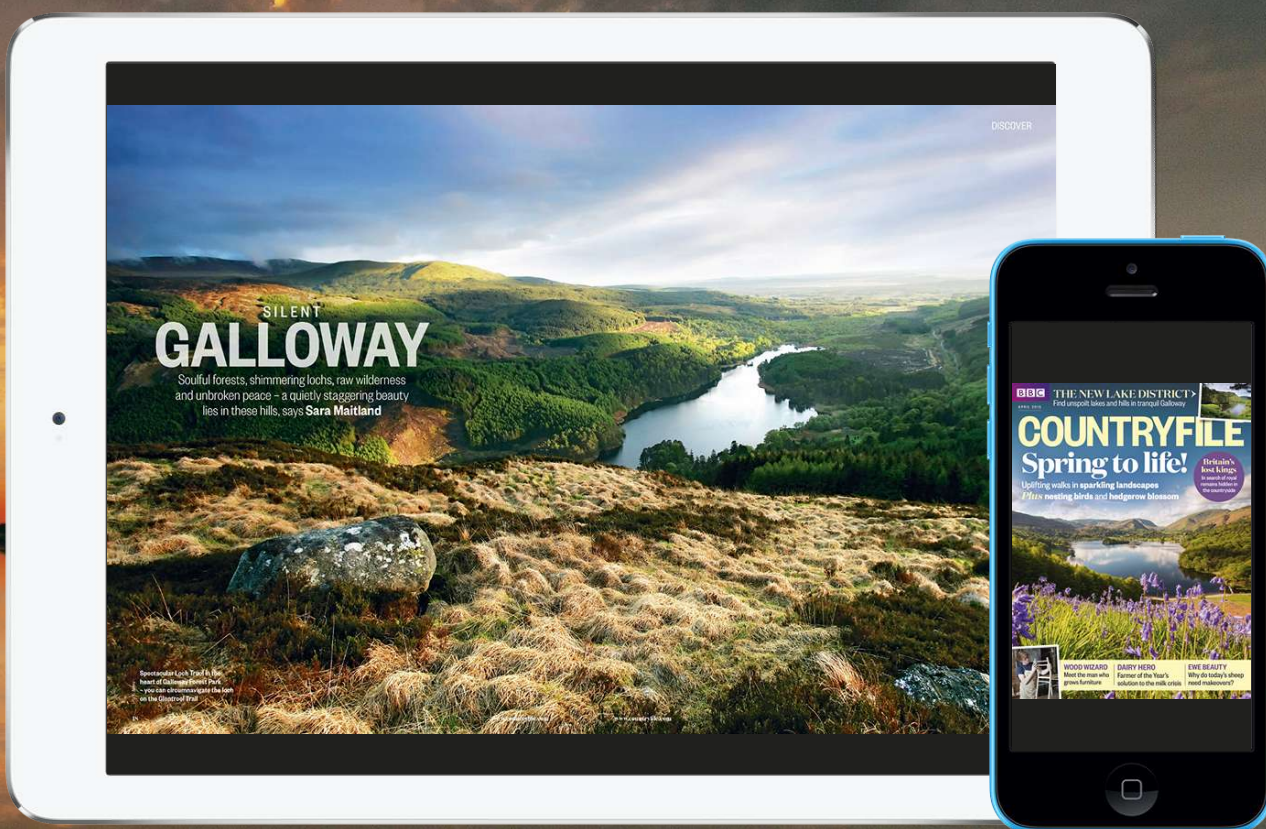


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IN SEARCH OF LOST KINGS

As Richard III's remains are reinterred in Leicester Cathedral following their discovery beneath a car park, **Joel Burden** unearths other monarchs who have eluded the royal burial chapels and found final resting places in the countryside

There has been much heated debate over where Richard III's remains ought to be reburied, but the only certainty is that nobody really knows what arrangement the king himself would have preferred. Of course we can be pretty sure that he didn't anticipate being laid to rest in the long-disappeared Franciscan Friary in Leicester, where his battered body "naked and despoiled to the skyne, and nothyng left aboue hym not so much as a clowe to cover his pryve members" was hastily shoved following the King's defeat and death at Bosworth Field in 1485.

Richard III was not unique in avoiding the company of the 16 English and British monarchs buried in Westminster Abbey, and the 12 others buried at Windsor Castle. Leaving aside six English and British monarchs who were buried entirely beyond these shores, there remain a surprising number of kings to be discovered on a winding journey through an arc of cathedral cities and towns in southern England...

EDWARD II REIGNED 1307-1327

Gloucester Cathedral

The journey begins in Gloucester at the tomb of Edward II, a medieval gem. Edward was a hapless though not unlikeable king, whose penchant for parvenu male courtiers and interest in low-born activities such as hedging and ditching – at the expense of more martial pursuits such as jousting or fighting the Scots – resulted in a rapid loss of support among his more macho leading barons. Edward's ultimate undoing, though, was to fall out with his queen, who thereafter played an instrumental role in having the king deposed in favour of their teenage son. Edward was imprisoned in Berkeley Castle where he was later murdered, it was rumoured, by the insertion of a heated lead pipe into his rectum.

Although Edward II's burial at Gloucester Abbey can be explained straightforwardly by the church's relative proximity to Berkeley, it had an unexpected artistic consequence when the king's canopied, alabaster tomb became the improbable focus of a medieval miracle cult that

In Gloucester Cathedral lies the tomb of Edward II, who was murdered in 1327. His beautifully sculpted tomb became the focus of a medieval miracle cult



attracted a flood of free-spending pilgrims. The magnificent mid-14th-century choir at Gloucester was funded by pilgrim donations made at Edward's tomb and gave birth to the uniquely English perpendicular style of gothic architecture. In an ironic twist, this later found its most exuberant expression in the mausoleums of St George's Chapel at Windsor and Henry VII chapel at Westminster Abbey.

ÆTHELSTAN R.924-939

Malmesbury Abbey

South of Gloucester lies the beautiful town of Malmesbury, whose ancient Abbey contains the tomb of one of England's least celebrated yet greatest kings. Æthelstan was a grandson of Alfred the Great and was the first ruler to subdue all other kingdoms in Britain to become, for a brief period, and as he proclaimed on his own coinage, "King of the whole of Britain". He was a notable law-maker, patron of the Church and promoter of learning, and the first English king to play a truly prominent role in continental European politics.



ABOVE Visit the damaged tomb effigy of King Æthelstan in Malmesbury Abbey, dating from the 14th century **TOP** Bosworth battlefield, where Richard III lost his life in

Æthelstan was devoted to the cult of St Aldhelm (d. 709), the first abbot of Malmesbury, which probably explains his choice of burial location. It was also said that the men of Malmesbury played a decisive part in the king's great victory over the Scots and the Vikings at the Battle of Brunanburh in 937.

A much-damaged tomb effigy can be viewed in the north aisle of the truncated church, but it dates only from the 14th century and no longer marks the exact spot of Æthelstan's

grave, which was lost when much of the original abbey church was demolished at the Reformation.

HENRY I R.1100-1135

Reading Abbey

Immortalised in the eponymous ballad by Oscar Wilde, Reading Gaol stands an unlikely guardian over the site of the high altar of Reading Abbey, the last resting place of Henry I. A powerful and effective king, Henry reorganised the justice system in England and first established the Exchequer to collect and audit royal revenue. He founded the Cluniac Reading Abbey in 1121 as his intended burial site, an arrangement his successor King Stephen would repeat at Faversham in Kent. Endowed with a relic of the True Cross, Reading had the largest abbey church in England, yet only fragments have survived since Dissolution.

Henry I famously died from eating a 'surfeit of lampreys' while campaigning in Normandy. His body was eviscerated and wrapped in a bull's hide to preserve it on the journey home, but the embalming had been botched. After

KING JOHN R.1199-1216 ➤

WORCESTER CATHEDRAL

THE royal tyrant of English history. His primary legacy – Magna Carta – was forced on him by his disenchanted barons in the desperate hope that John's like would never be seen again. An epic failure as a monarch, and a man with few redeeming personal qualities, his memory prompted the leading monastic chronicler of the age to write that "Hell itself is defiled by the presence of King John".

John's decision to be buried at Worcester, near the shrine of Saint Wulfstan, was a result of his policy failures, since the loss of French territories ruled out burial in his ancestral Anjou. He founded Beaulieu Abbey in Hampshire as his intended burial church but fell out with its Cistercian monks when the Pope had the king excommunicated. The Benedictines at Worcester Priory proved more amenable.

Today, John's Purbeck marble tomb effigy survives as the oldest royal effigy in England. The recumbent king is depicted in full majesty, with tiny censuring figures of Saints Oswald and Wulfstan perched on each shoulder, suggesting the power relationship between king and church John would have preferred.



Worcester Cathedral on the River Severn, the site of England's oldest royal effigy – that of tyrannical King John BELOW A 1901 statue of King Alfred in Winchester

a month of delays caused by poor weather in the Channel, the corpse had decayed to such an extent that, as one contemporary chronicler salaciously reported, a royal servant actually expired on the spot from inhaling the noxious fumes.

ALFRED THE GREAT R.871-899

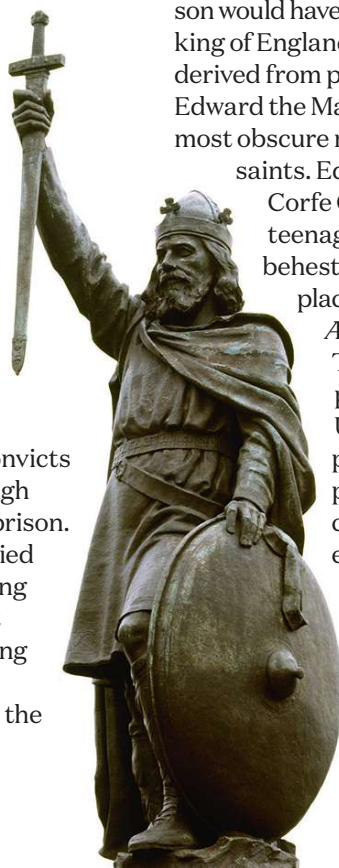
Hyde Abbey, Winchester

Onwards to Winchester, where once the remains of Alfred the Great resided on the site of Winchester Cathedral, alongside those of three other kings of Wessex, four pre-Norman Conquest kings of England, and the second Norman king William Rufus, shot in a hunting 'accident' in the New Forest.

Alfred has come to be regarded as one of the greatest kings to have ruled within Britain, and although the kingdom he preserved and extended in the face of hostile Danish invasion was that of Wessex, his reign laid the foundation for the establishment of an enlarged kingdom of England. Among his many achievements were legal reforms, the promotion of education in the English language, the foundation of

a navy and the reorganisation of military defence around a system of burhs (the origin of 'boroughs').

Despite his fame, the whereabouts of Alfred's bones have long been shrouded in mystery. The king's body remained on the site of the current cathedral until 1110, when the monks were moved (and took Alfred with them) to a new abbey site at nearby Hyde, allowing a new Norman cathedral to be built on the vacated Minster site. Alfred's remains were lost at the dissolution of Hyde Abbey, but seemingly were disinterred in 1788 when convicts dug across the site of the high altar while constructing a prison. Scattered bones found buried nearby in the 1860s were long associated with Alfred, but following radiocarbon-dating in 2013 were found to be of 14th-century origin, and so the mystery persists.



EDWARD THE MARTYR R.975-978

Shaftesbury Abbey

It was notoriously remarked that if the abbess of Shaftesbury could have wed the abbot of Glastonbury then their son would have been wealthier than the king of England. Much of this wealth derived from pilgrims to the tomb of Edward the Martyr, one of England's most obscure monarchs and unlikely saints. Edward was murdered at

Corfe Castle while still a teenager, supposedly at the behest of his stepmother, who placed her own son Æthelred on the throne. The presumably penitent Æthelred 'the Unready' (r. 978-1016) played a major role in promoting his brother's cult, and his relics were elevated in ceremonies in 981 and 1001.

As happened with several English kings, the tomb of Edward the Martyr was lost at the Reformation. In ➤



Iona Abbey contains the remains of a host of Scottish kings, including Macbeth
RIGHT Unfortunately for James IV, he did not find his way to Iona, and is still missing in action under a golf course in Richmond



A LOST KING OF SCOTS

JAMES IV (R. 1488-1513)

The kings of Scots chose burial in a range of places, the most popular being Iona Abbey and Dunfermline Abbey. However, the headless corpse of one of Scotland's greatest kings remains undiscovered beneath a golf course at Richmond-upon-Thames.

James IV met his death in disastrous battle with the English at Flodden Field in Northumberland. His battered corpse was sent to London as a trophy of war, where Queen Catherine of Aragon, during the absence in France of her husband (and James' brother-in-law) Henry VIII, had the body sent to Sheen Priory at Richmond. As James had been excommunicated at the time of his death, he could not be buried in consecrated ground. The coffin mouldered in a shed for years until the head became detached and was reputedly used as a football by Elizabethan workmen. Later, James' head found its way to a charnel pit at Great St Michael's Church in London, now the site of a pub. The king's body no doubt still lies somewhere under the fairways beneath which Sheen Priory long ago disappeared.

LOVE NATURE

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Photo: Iriskuerschner.com Location: Val Grande



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1931, the rediscovery of his remains by JE Wilson-Claridge gave rise to a bizarre passage in the history of English royal burial. Wilson-Claridge retained the royal 'relics', as he felt them to be, before donating them, prior to his death, to the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia. This bequest was disputed and, in consequence, the relics spent much of the 1970s and 1980s in a bank vault in Woking. They were enshrined at the specially built Church of St Edward the Martyr at Brookwood in Surrey when the case was settled in accordance with Wilson-Claridge's wishes.

KING ARTHUR

Glastonbury Abbey

The much ruined Glastonbury Abbey witnessed the burial of three Anglo-Saxon kings, yet today's visitors, like their medieval counterparts, are drawn by a different sort of royal resting place.

At the site of the abbey's high altar there is a rectangular impression in the grass, framed in plain concrete, with a



BELOW The ruins of Glastonbury Abbey, the legendary burial place of King Arthur

rusty iron sign that reads: "Site of King Arthur's tomb. In the year 1191 the bodies of King Arthur and his queen were said to have been found on the south side of the Lady Chapel. On 19 April 1278 their remains were removed in the presence of King Edward I and Queen Eleanor to a black marble tomb on this site. This tomb survived until the dissolution of the abbey in 1539."

Was there such a king as Arthur and how did he become associated with Glastonbury? Modern historians place the sixth-century king in that elusive

space where myth meets half-remembered history. However, Arthur first burst forth into wider popular consciousness in the pages Geoffrey of Monmouth's influential 12th-century *Historia Regnum Britanniae*.

Glastonbury's monks were not slow to see a good opportunity, especially as they faced the problem of rebuilding an abbey church completely destroyed by fire in 1184. Glastonbury became the fabled Isle of Avalon, and whatever the scepticism of modern commentators, contemporary chroniclers took up the story of Arthur's rediscovery with credulous gusto, and helped launch the abbey into the medieval super-league of monastic wealth. ☞

The exhibition *Richard III: Man & Myth* will open on 27 March at the Yorkshire Museum in York.



Dr Joel Burden is an historian and writer who has researched and published a number of articles on medieval English royal funerals.



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COUNTRYFILE NEWS

JOHN CRAVEN

NATURE IS OUR MOST VALUABLE ECONOMIC ASSET

In a few weeks, when the next government starts to tackle its must-do list, where, I wonder, in its priorities will come an official report that spells out how we can become “the first generation to leave the natural environment in a better state than it inherited”?

That was the bold aim set out in a 2011 White Paper. A think tank called the Natural Capital Committee (NCC) was given three years to come up with answers. Now it has produced its findings and chairman Professor Dieter Helm says: “There is a great opportunity to improve the wellbeing and prosperity of both urban and rural populations and restore some of the natural capital that has been lost.”

The message is clear: if economic growth is to be sustained, natural capital must be safeguarded. But just what is natural capital? In simple terms, it is those elements of nature (minerals, land, water, air and food) that are imperative for human survival – the basis for life quality and all economic activity.

SAVING THE ESSENTIALS

Over the years, this natural wealth has been exploited and depleted and the NCC’s task was to advise on how to halt the decline in England and efficiently safeguard it. Some task – so can it be done?

The NCC, made up of eight men and women with expertise in ecology, business, economics and environmental science, is not downhearted and has come up with a strategy for the next 25 years. It urges the government,



Wetlands, such as these at Ynyshir besides the Dyfi in Ceredigion, can provide flood protection and boost air quality

“At last, the concept of placing financial value on our natural capital is being addressed”

working with the private sector and NGOs, to set up clear targets with ‘milestones’ to measure progress – all covered by new law.

The strategy says: “Carefully planned investments in natural capital, targeted at the best locations, will deliver significant value for money and generate large economic returns.” It finds a strong economic case for:

- Planting up to 250,000 acres of woodland near towns and cities to generate net societal benefits of more than £500 million a year.

- Restoring peat land on around 140,000 acres of upland to deliver benefits of £570 million over 40 years in carbon values.
- Establishing around 100,000 hectares of wetland upstream of major towns and cities (benefit to cost ratios could be as high as 9:1)
- Creating intertidal habitats to provide coastal flood protection, carbon storage and wildlife areas.
- Restoring fish stocks, especially shellfish and white fish such as cod. The long-term gains could secure jobs in the industry for generations to come.

The NCC also expects much to be gained from investing in urban greenspaces (potentially reducing healthcare costs by £2.1 billion) and urban air quality (the top environmental risk factor for premature deaths) as well as by improving the environmental performance of farming.

TIME FOR ACTION

Vital to the strategy’s success is long-term funding from business and government. Among the NCC’s ideas are controversial notions such as compensation payments from those using non-renewable resources such as oil and shale gas.

At last, the concept of placing financial and environmental value on our natural capital is being addressed. If sensible advice is to become action, all will depend on how high on the in-tray this document sits when our next political leaders take power.



Watch John on
Countryfile on Sunday
evenings on BBC One.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES THE GREAT MILK CRISIS

by Mark Rowe

What's the story?

Britain's dairy farmers say they have reached crisis point. The price they are paid for milk has dropped 16% in a year, and farmers have blockaded milk processing plants in protest. With milk often cheaper than bottled water, *BBC Countryfile Magazine* asks: what does the future hold for the industry?

George Eustice, the farming minister, says the dairy industry has been on "a rollercoaster ride". In June 2012, UK farm gate milk prices fell to 26p per litre; in 2013 it rose to 35p; by late 2014 it had dropped to 30p. But some farmers are now being paid 19p per litre.

Why has this issue come to a head now?

• Too much milk being produced

According to the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (EFRA) select committee, the strong prices of 2013 encouraged a rise in UK milk production during the spring and summer of 2014, as mild weather conditions helped farmers produce more.

• Falling global demand

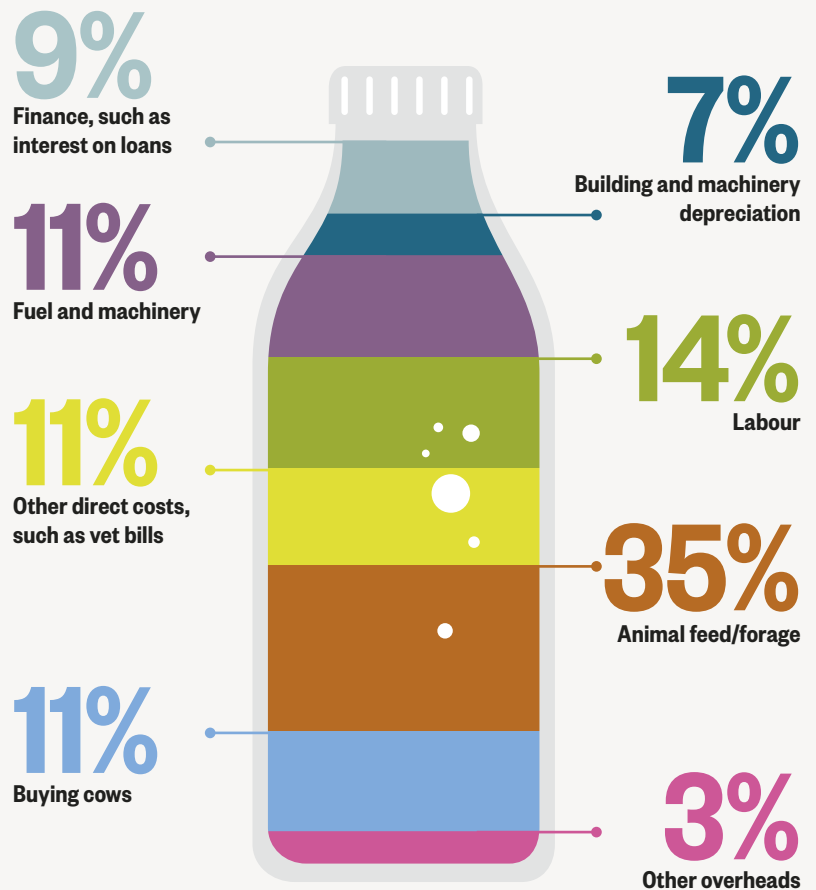
At the same time, world demand for milk is dropping. "We're seeing the growing influence of global markets on the UK market," says Andrew Opie, of the British Retail Consortium (BRC), which represents supermarkets. "That's come to a head over the past six to nine months." Exports to Russia ended abruptly on August 2014 when the Kremlin announced a trade embargo on dairy imports [in tit-for-tat sanctions over Ukraine]. And demand in China for powdered baby milk has dropped, too. Sian Davies, chief dairy adviser for the NFU says: "We don't like it, but we are used to it. The Russian embargo and a drop in demand from China means there are a lot more producers floating around the global market." Andrew Opie agrees: "The influence of the Chinese consumer on the price of milk can be as great as that of the UK consumer."

• Supermarkets' price war

"We've seen a number of different variables come together and at the same time we've had a retail price war with discounters cutting prices," says Sian Davies. "One of the loss leaders they love cutting is milk."

MAKING A LITRE OF MILK: HARD WORK IN EVERY DROP

Dairy farming is a resource intensive industry, as revealed by this diagram illustrating what goes into every single litre of milk produced:



HOW MUCH MONEY GOES TO THE FARMER?

Here is an example breakdown of what proportion of the price consumers pay for a pint of milk goes to farmers, processors and retailers. These figures are prices paid, not profits. Such figures can fluctuate widely over time and location and are not representative of every farmer.



Effect on farmers

According to EFRA, there are now fewer than 10,000 dairy farmers in Britain and the NFU warns that this could drop to 5,000 by 2025.

"Volatility of worldwide milk markets is making financial planning and investment impossible for small-scale producers unable to hedge against changes beyond their control," says EFRA's Anne McIntosh.

George Dunn of the Tenant Farmers Association says many tenant

farmers had rents set when prices were good, but must still pay them now prices are lower. Amanda Ball of Dairy Co, which works on behalf of dairy farmers says: "Producing food is a biological process – you can't turn it off as you could if you were making widgets."

FEWER THAN
10,000
DAIRY FARMERS
LEFT IN THE
UK

FARMING NUMBERS

NFU says the number of dairy farmers has fallen to below 10,000, compared with almost 36,000 in 1995.

And total dairy cattle numbers are down:



Key questions about the milk crisis

• How much are the supermarkets to blame?

Some farmers claim supermarkets have collectively **made a profit of £550m on milk sales in the past year**. The BRC says any figures are "pure speculation". The BRC's Andrew Opie says while retailers have reduced the price of milk for consumers, **it's retailers who are paying for the price reduction, not farmers**. "Retailers are reacting to consumer demand but it doesn't make any difference to the farm-gate price." But the NFU's Sian Davies feels the price is influential. "The low supermarket price is unrelated to the farm-gate price, but it sends a message of a lack of confidence to the farmers."

• Can the government help?

Opie says. "The government, as a huge buyer of dairy products for schools, hospitals and prisons, could potentially play a part and react to the huge global volatility in milk prices."

• Could things get worse?

The Farmers' Union of Wales says an EU quota system that limits how much farmers can produce ends this month. It warns that farmers may simply produce more to boost revenues, which may only see the price drop again as the market becomes even more over-supplied.

Potential long-term impacts of the crisis

• A more efficient dairy industry

"The poor figures for milk may hasten the restructuring that is going on at the moment. The industry is becoming more efficient and we believe that dairy has a bright future. That doesn't necessarily mean that large is better. We have a highly skilled industry," says Andrew Opie of the BRC.

• Changes to the landscape

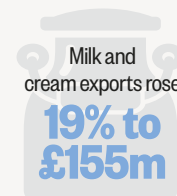
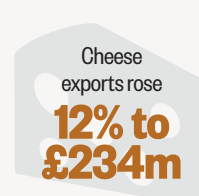
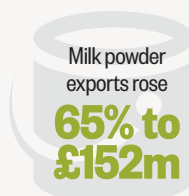
"If we continue to have fewer dairy farms in the UK, inevitably the landscape will change," says Amanda Ball of Dairy Co. "The question is, do we want to see our countryside run in the way it is, with that rural connection to where our food comes from?"

• Stronger regulation of supply chain

The EFRA report urges changes to the role of the Groceries Code Adjudicator (GCA), who regulates the relationship between supermarkets and suppliers. EFRA said that the adjudicator should give all small-scale producers protection against major retailers. Currently, the adjudicator can only investigate complaints involving direct suppliers to the big 10 supermarkets and retailers. As most milk production is small-scale, that excludes most dairy farmers.

A brighter future?

Farmers may be able to boost their profits by selling more and more dairy products and milk powder outside the EU. EFRA's report says there are "major opportunities" to tap into increasing world demand for dairy in China, Russia and Africa. According to DEFRA in 2013/14...



Overall, the total value of dairy exports has risen 39% since 2009, last year reaching £1.3 billion by value.

Turn over for our interview with award-winning dairy farmer Neil Darwent ➔

BEHIND THE HEADLINES INTERVIEW

MILK: A SOLUTION?

Words: Mark Rowe Photos: Oliver Edwards

How can we save the British dairy industry? With a little common sense, some traditional values and one special breed of cow, according to dairy farmer Neil Darwent

Bigger is best, more is mightier. That's been the mantra of milk production in recent years – but is there another way forward?

Neil Darwent thinks so. The manager of a dairy farm in Somerset, Neil has developed a profitable but low-intensity way of producing milk – winning the 2014 Outstanding Farmer of the Year prize at the Radio 4 Food and Farming Awards for his efforts.

“I was astonished to win,” he says. “I have this burning passion, but there are days when you wonder if you are doing the right thing – so to get the acknowledgement from the awards was really important.”

Neil says the award has helped outsiders understand the issues faced by farmers like him. “That’s why the award is so good – it brings milk and farming to a much wider audience.”

In 1986, after agricultural college, Neil thought the future lay in US-



Neil Darwent won Outstanding Farmer of the Year in the BBC Food and Farming Awards 2014

based Holstein cows – “leggy catwalk models” – with milk yields at that time unheard of in the UK. “We milked Holsteins three times a day and felt like pioneering, progressive farmers.”

But the going was not easy. “These cows were highly tuned athletes. They required a lot of support and nutrition if they were going to produce 60 litres of milk a day.” Then in 1997, on a visit

to the USA, he found dairy herds 2,000 cows strong. “I thought, ‘Wow, this is it, this is what the future should look like.’ I came back to the UK full of ideas.”

Neil looked after 3,000 cows across 13 herds at Lordswood Farms in Somerset, but still found himself running ever faster, he says, just to stand still. “If you farm intensively, you have lots of sheds, lots of machinery; you are on a treadmill. You have a high-cost system that works on low-profit margins. You make only 2p a litre but if you produce millions of litres you make a profit. If prices go the other way, things get tight.”

THE ANSWER?

The cows under Neil’s charge included three herds of Montbeliardes, a French breed. “At first they seemed fat and lazy, but then it dawned on me that they had something going for them. They were easy to manage, fertile and gave a good yield of milk.”

CLOCKWISE Neil raking hay beside his hefty and inquisitive Montbeliardes; mucking in with the calves; fresh milk from the herd; Neil examines the pump equipment



Rather than giving every ounce of energy to producing milk, Montbeliardes held something back. "There were fewer health issues, their male offspring commanded a good price for beef, and at the end of their milking lives they could be sold for beef, too." They were dual-purpose cows: good for both milk and meat.

They had another advantage: they ate grass. This, Neil points out, is the cheapest feed available. "Our country is wonderful for growing grass," he says, trying to keep a straight face. "Some farmers tell me their cows can't survive on grass and I ask myself what the hell is going on. But Montbeliardes didn't need molly-coddling," says Neil.

This grass-based system means low overheads, more resilience and a lower cost base, Neil argues. No wonder he and other dairy farmers call Montbeliardes – and other breeds with similar qualities – 'robust' cows.

The bottom line, according to Neil, is that robust herds can be more profitable than what he calls 'high output' cows (see next page).

QUALITY NOT QUANTITY

"The potential [of robust breeds] is enormous," says Neil. "But it's not easy for farmers. They are encouraged to pursue a high-output system by those selling feed, machinery, veterinary inputs and advice. Then they get a pat

on the back from the salesmen and a picture in the farming press for their high milk yields."

The fixation on high volumes has damaged the industry, he says. "It has been a disaster. We've ended up as global commodity players. It's a race to the bottom: who can milk the cheapest. When that story came out about the

"THE UNTAPPED POTENTIAL IS ENORMOUS. BUT IT'S NOT THAT EASY FOR MANY FARMERS"

8,000-cow dairy in Lincolnshire, I wanted to put my hand up and say 'that's not the way we farm.'"

The holdings Neil manages have shrunk to reflect his ethos and today he farms on 263 hectares, milking 210 cows and raising beef cattle from the dairy herd. He believes his model offers a way for the industry to build resilience against price fluctuations.

Neil's is now focused, he says, on "shifting from *volume* production to *value* production." He is convinced that people will pay a higher price for

milk. "There will always be people who will not be discerning, who see milk as a commodity, but others are increasingly asking questions about the provenance of their food." Looking for an opportunity to add value to milk from robust cows farmed on a simple, pasture-based system, he set up Free Range Dairy in 2011. This farmer-led initiative promotes the value of milk from pasture. Milk sold under the Free Range Dairy Pasture Promise label is guaranteed to have come from herds that are grazed for a minimum of six months a year (read more at www.freerangedairy.org). Neil reports that the movement is growing.

TIME TO CHANGE

So what does the future hold? Neil is quick to say his approach will not work as a one-size-fits-all solution. The future, he warns, may see the number of dairy farms halve to 5,000 by 2025.

But he adds: "There is still time to reverse the trend. We're seeing micro-dairies of 10-30 cows getting a good price for milk, they're delivering what consumers want.

"Farmers have to enjoy what they are doing. The biggest danger to the milk industry is just doing what it's always done. We can stop the slide."

Why are Montbeliarde cows so good? Turn the page for details...



Photo: Emma Russell/BBC



FOOD HEROES 2015

Last spring, Neil Darwent was named Outstanding Farmer of the Year at the **BBC Food and Farming Awards 2014**.

Launched in 2000, the awards are designed to "honour those who have done most to promote the cause of good food".

There are 10 awards, including a food 'game changer' – someone who inspired us all to think differently about food.

Countryfile is doing its bit with the **Countryfile Farming Hero award**, judged by Adam Henson and fellow farmer Mike Gooding (pictured above right with Neil Darwent).

You can find out about the Farming Hero nominees on *Countryfile* in April, and tune in on May 10 for *Countryfile's* farming special, which will include more about the winner.

Last year's awards ceremony in Bristol was a



star-studded affair attended by celebrity chefs including Raymond Blanc, Mary Berry and Jamie Oliver. Like last year, the 2015 ceremony opens a major food festival, Bristol Food Connections, which runs from 1-9 May (www.bristolfoodconnections.com).



The awards are also the subject of *The Food Programme* on BBC Radio 4 at 12.30pm on Sunday, 3 May; or listen to highlights on Radio 4 on 4 May from 3pm.

BATTLE OF THE COWS

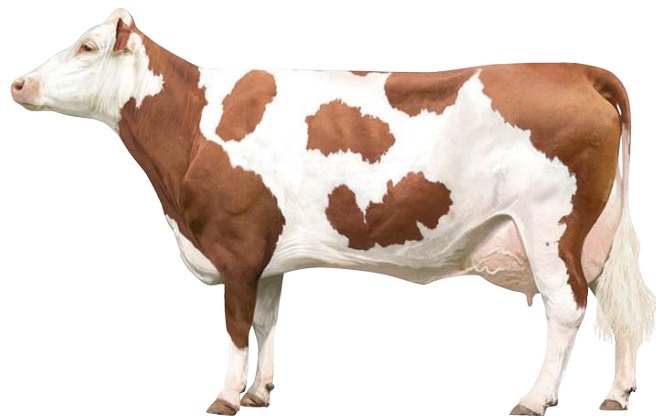
Dairy farmer Neil Darwent believes his robust cows offer a better future for the industry. His figures below compare high-output cows with robust cows.

High-output cows are popular breeds such as **Holsteins** and **Holstein-Friesians**, which dominate the dairy industry, producing most of the milk we consume.

Robust cows produce less milk – but, says Neil, can be more profitable. These include Neil's **Montbeliardes**, as well as pure-bred **British Friesians**.



HIGH-OUTPUT COW



ROBUST COW

MILK

High-output cows produce more milk in a year – enough to pay their higher feed and forage costs, and still make £86 a year more than robust cows from milk alone.

8,690 litres	ANNUAL MILK SOLD	6,813 litres
+£2,086	MILK INCOME PER COW (24P A LITRE)	+£1,635
-£1,145	FEED & FORAGE COSTS PER COW	-£780
£941	MARGIN OVER FEED & FORAGE	£855

KEEPING HERD NUMBERS UP

But in other ways, robust cows save the farmer money. As animals reach the end of their productive life they need to be replaced and this is more cost effective in the case of robust cows. There are two reasons: the carcass of a robust cow yields more valuable meat; secondly, robust cows live longer, reducing the costs of replacement. In a typical year, 20% of a robust herd must be replaced, compared to 28% of a high-output herd.

+£450	CULL COW VALUE*	+£550
-£1,800	COST OF REPLACEMENT ANIMAL	-£1,600
-£378	NET REPLACEMENT COST PER COW PER YEAR*	-£210

* The value of a mature cow sold for beef *The cost per cow in the herd of maintaining herd numbers year on year.

MONEY FROM CALVES

On top of that, the farmer makes more money from selling robust-breed calves than high-output calves. Robust cows calve more frequently due to better fertility and their calves command a higher market value for beef.

51	CALVES TO SELL EACH YEAR (PER HERD OF 100)	70
£75	AVERAGE PRICE PER CALF SOLD	£185
£38	ANNUAL INCOME PER COW FROM CALF SALES	£130

FINAL TALLY

£601	NET MARGIN PER COW PER YEAR	£775
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NOTE Neil's figures don't include other costs such as vets' bills, which he says tend to be higher in the case of high-output cows.

Have your say: Neil Darwent is convinced that dairy farming his way means healthier, happier cows – and better profits for the farmer. What's your view? Write to the address on page 71 or email editor@countryfile.com

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Grand total		

* plus P&P

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Address _____
Postcode _____ Telephone _____
E-mail _____
Will only be used in case of delivery difficulties.

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- 2 Please debit my card (Visa/Visa Debit/Mastercard/Maestro) by the above amount.

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Expires / Issue No CV code Last 3 digits on back of card

Signature

☐ Tick this box if you don't want to receive mailings from anyone other than us.





While we enjoy spring walks and gardening, not very far away, birds are hard at work with the perilous business of nesting. Here, amid the wisteria, blackbird chicks aged one to two weeks shelter in their nest

www.countryfile.com

SECRETS OF THE SPRING HEDGEROW

How much do we know about nesting season, a crucial period in the lives of our most familiar birds? Naturalist **Dominic Couzens** opens a window into the hidden world

It's spring, and everywhere birds are building, refurbishing or planning nests. If your human neighbours were doing the same, your street would be clogged with trucks and vans, dust would coat everything and the air would hum with construction noise.

In the bird world, however, building is usually quiet and furtive. There are, of course, exceptions – colonies of **rooks** in the treetops make an almost continual din – but on the whole birds don't want to draw attention to their nests. Nest-building is a trade-off between the necessity of making a nursery for the eggs and the need to hide from the threat of predators. So non-colonial birds bring in materials quietly and furtively, often keeping well hidden and being particularly careful if they think they are being watched (some, such as **waders**, may even pretend to build another nest nearby). In this way, they differ markedly from the noisier human sort of construction workers although, like human builders, birds similarly confine their hardest work to the morning hours.

THROWN TOGETHER

Not surprisingly, the majority of bird species make only as much effort as is strictly necessary when building nests. You only have to look at a **wood pigeon's** effort to see the embodiment of this reality; **pigeons** and **doves** are the original cowboy builders, creating the flimsiest stick bases through which it is often possible to see the eggs from below – you wouldn't engage a pigeon to work on your extension.

On the other hand, of course, too bulky a pigeon nest would be dangerously obvious. Birds are expedient. A **robin** can apparently build its nest in just a couple of days. **Long-tailed tits** are unusual in taking up to three weeks to build theirs, using thousands of

pieces of moss, lichen, cobwebs and feathers, but they begin very early in spring, well before the eggs are laid.

In most birds, the female is at least in charge of the nest and most often the sole builder. This isn't because of the male's laziness or need to take a coffee break; it is because the male is forever engaged in the vital task of protecting the territory in which the nest is placed, usually by singing. Without border protection, a breeding attempt will fail.

One rule that applies as much to birds as it does to us is the estate agents' mantra of 'location, location, location'. Nest sites require two main attributes – safety and shelter – and some are much better for this than others. A significant number of birds nest in holes in trees or rocks (among them **tits**, **starlings**, **owls** and **flycatchers**) and demand invariably outstrips supply. If you think that gazumping is the worst thing that can happen to a house-hunter, ask a bird. **Great tits** have been known to fight to the death over a choice tree hole.

“NEST SITES REQUIRE TWO MAIN ATTRIBUTES – SAFETY AND SHELTER”



ABOVE Holding feathers in its beak, a long-tailed tit lines its nest

Photos: Ardea, FIPA



ABOVE An adult goldfinch incubates her nest at the end of a pear tree branch
BELOW 'Reptilian' coal tit chicks hatch into a brutal world

NOTICING BIRDS' NESTS

If you are looking out for nests, the first rule is to be careful not to cause any disturbance to the birds themselves. If your curiosity to check on your garden blackbird is unbearable, make it a quick peep and make sure you don't disturb the nearby vegetation, in case a sharp-eyed predator might notice a small change in the position of a branch, for example, and be led to the nest. You can easily prove that a bird is attempting to breed nearby without ever actually having to see the structure itself – just notice the steps below.

THERE ARE THREE STAGES WHEN BREEDING IS OBVIOUS:

1. When the adults are building the nest and bringing in material; or they may be excavating an obvious hole.
2. When the young have hatched and the adults are bringing in food, following the same route.
3. When the young are leaving or have left the nest and are being noisy in beseeching the adults for food.



QUEST FOR A NEST

You might think that, as far as safety is concerned, a bird would nest as high up as possible, either on a rock face, a building or a tree. However, treetops are not very good as nest sites: they are exposed to the elements (including swaying branches) and are accessible to aerial predators (and possibly some climbing animals).

In fact, most small birds build very low down, almost on the ground (**robins**, for example, often nest on a bank), where the vegetation is thickest and there are more hiding places. **Water birds** may simply put their nests on an island, accessible only by swimming, or on a cliff, accessible to an agile flyer. **Goldfinches** are interesting for building cup nests quite high up, usually right at the end of a branch that is hard to reach for a ground predator; they also often nest on branches overhanging water.

Every bird lays eggs and a gathering of eggs incubated at much the same time is known as a clutch. Most birds lay eggs that complement the general invisibility of the nest, so in open nests or on the ground they are dull coloured and often intricately patterned with speckles and spots, typically with a pattern individual to the female concerned.

However, birds that usually lay eggs in holes and other dark places tend to have



GREAT TIT

Nests in holes in trees or walls. The nest is a cup of moss and grass lined with feathers and plant down. Up to 15 eggs may be laid. One or two broods a year.

LITTLE OWL

Nests in holes in trees (and occasionally rabbit burrows!) The nest is unlined and may contain three to five eggs. Readily uses owl nestboxes.

CHAFFINCH

Nest of grass, moss, feathers and spiders' webs, usually in a fork of a tree or shrub. Lays between two and eight eggs and may have two clutches a year.

BLACKBIRD

Nest made of well-woven straw, grass and twigs low down in dense shrubs and hedgerows. Lays three to five eggs and may have up to three broods a year.

CUCKOO AND PIPITS

A cuckoo doesn't build a nest – it lays its eggs in the nests of small birds such as meadow pipits and dunnocks, leaving them to foster its young.

WOOD PIGEON

A flimsy, rather rudimentary collection of twigs are used to create a platform in a tree or ledge. It lays two eggs and has up to three clutches a year.

GOLDFINCH

Nests at the end of branches. Its cup-shaped nest is made of moss and grass lined with wool and feathers. Up to three clutches a year with three to seven eggs.

HOUSEMARTIN

Builds a cup-nest of mud under the eaves of outbuildings and houses. Lays up to six eggs and may have two or three broods before migrating south again.

ROOKERY

Noisy rookeries dominate large, outgrown hedgerow trees. Large nests of twigs bound with mud, animal hair/wool and grass. Up to nine eggs.

LONG-TAILED TIT

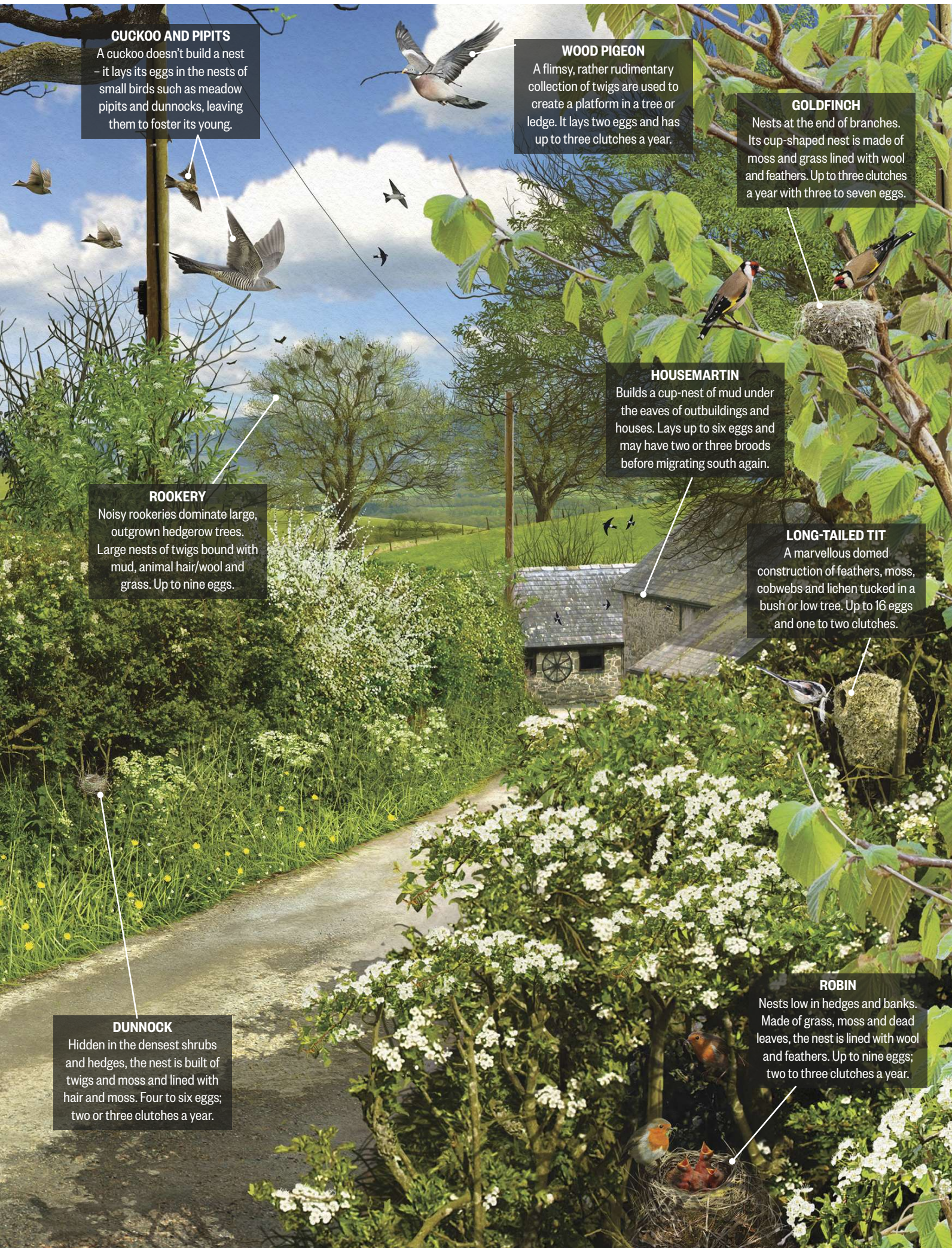
A marvellous domed construction of feathers, moss, cobwebs and lichen tucked in a bush or low tree. Up to 16 eggs and one to two clutches.

DUNNOCK

Hidden in the densest shrubs and hedges, the nest is built of twigs and moss and lined with hair and moss. Four to six eggs; two or three clutches a year.

ROBIN

Nests low in hedges and banks. Made of grass, moss and dead leaves, the nest is lined with wool and feathers. Up to nine eggs; two to three clutches a year.





ABOVE Dunnock chicks compete for food **BELOW** One of up to 800 feeding sorties a day for this blue tit, as it returns to its nest with a caterpillar

SHOULD YOU SAVE CHICKS?

It is hard to resist the sight of a grounded and helpless-looking baby bird on a lawn, and difficult to curb your admirable natural instinct to intervene and rescue. However, please desist. On most occasions, the fledgling will not be abandoned at all, and your act of rescue will simply keep its rightful parent away, making the feathered toddler hungrier and the parent more alarmed. The parent will invariably be better able to feed its youngster than you are.

Even if your chick or nestling has fallen out by accident, returning it to a known nest is fraught with risk. When disturbed, young close to the hatching stage are prone to stage a mass-evacuation, causing more harm than good. It is also illegal to disturb a nest willfully.

Sometimes young birds fall into risky situations with cats, dogs or cars. Here, it's better to bite your lip and accept that thousands of young birds face these threats each day. If the cat or dog is yours, you can keep it away; your conscience can then be salved.

Robin chick



white or pale blue eggs, to help the parent or parents see them and incubate them correctly. **Starlings** even capitalise on their dark nest cavities to steal into a neighbour's nest and lay one or more of their own eggs, taking advantage of a foster-parent's hard work, cuckoo-style. There are, of course, exceptions to the egg colour theories. **Tits**, which ought to have white eggs, lay reddish ones with blotches, while **dunnocks** lay blue eggs despite building 'normal' cup nests.

RAISING THE BROOD

The amount of time a parent spends incubating its clutch is surprisingly consistent among different groups of birds, with approximately two weeks being the norm for birds from **tits** to **crows** – although there are plenty of exceptions, including **waterbirds** and **raptors**. The fact is, though, that nests are definitely not homes offering long-term safety and comfort. Instead, incubating and fledging are rushed through, so as to minimise their risks. The less time spent in the nest, the better.

Although many birds incubate for about the same length of time, the precise starting point, when they actually apply body heat to their eggs, is highly significant. Most species only begin when the clutch is complete, or just before. So, if a tit lays 10 eggs, it doesn't start until the last, or second last egg is laid.

This means that all the eggs will enjoy the same period of incubation and have a roughly equal start in life. In truth it's a rough-and-tumble start, because sibling nestlings have no regard at all for each other, and a visit from a parent is a free-for-all among competing mouths (think giving out sweets at a children's party), where the weakest will struggle to get their share.

It is these broods that bring apparent sweat (birds don't sweat) to the parents' brow as they spend all day flying back and forth to try to provide for their legions of offspring. A pair of **blue tits** may make 800 visits to their young in a day because they bulk-produce offspring, all at once. Since tits time their breeding to coincide with a glut in woodland caterpillar production, they only bring up one brood (or one clutch) a year, whereas most other small insectivorous birds (**blackbirds**, **robins** etc.) have two or more broods through the season.

SHARP IN CLAW

Certain other birds follow a very different strategy of incubation that, in a way, institutionalises sibling unfairness. Parent **birds of prey**, **owls**, **swifts** and **jackdaws** begin incubation with the first egg and, since each egg will have a similar development time, subsequent eggs hatch later than others. Those nestlings will need to compete with older siblings for food, often to fatal disadvantage. If food is plentiful, they will get their share, but if it isn't, this strategy at least ensures that the first-born chicks have a chance of survival. It is a sobering example of bird pragmatism.

Another example of similar pragmatism concerns the fledglings themselves. When you spot a young bird it often looks somewhat dishevelled, like a small child with ill-fitting clothing. In fact it is literally wearing cut-price plumage – all the energy goes into growing and the first set of feathers is poor, and quickly replaced.

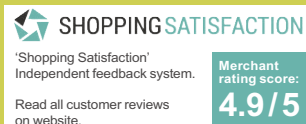
In our world where children are precious, it can be upsetting to encounter a different natural culture. In the bird world, the survival of breeding adults is paramount, while nests, eggs and young are, to be blunt, mass-produced. It is expediency, once again. **CF**



Dominic Couzens is a natural history journalist and author. His books include *The Secret Lives of British Birds* and *The Secret Lives of Garden Wildlife*.

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The man who grows furniture

Meet the designer reviving the fortunes of hazel coppice by crafting stylish cabinets, chairs and tables from his family's woodland

Words: Rosanna Morris Photos: Rosie Barnett

Deep in the hubbub of southeast London seems an unlikely setting for a *Countryfile* interview. Yet from here, in a dusty workshop between Victorian warehouses, one man is attempting to reinvigorate British woodlands.

Young designer-maker Sebastian Cox is trying to solve the problem of underused British coppice wood and reimagine the UK's timber industry one beautiful steam-bent, woven-seated chair at a time.

FAMILY TREES

Sebastian's handcrafted furniture is mainly made from coppice hazel rods grown in his family's woodland in Kent, where he built dens as a child. "I love how I'm working in the woodland where I grew up and how much it is involved in my career," he says.

Not only is Sebastian proving how versatile and appealing native timbers can be through good design, he is showing that by using fast-growing, self-replenishing wood on a large scale, we can improve the health of ancient woodlands around the country and make them productive again – through the age-old management technique of coppicing.

Sebastian adapts techniques, revives traditional skills and blends these with contemporary craftsmanship to create beautiful pieces, for which consumers are prepared to pay handsome prices. His approach is earning him respect in the

design industry and has already won him some high-profile fans. *Grand Designs* presenter Kevin McCloud says about him: "There are furniture-makers who craft elegant furniture and woodsmen who make chunky stools from coppice wood. Sebastian is a rarity: he crafts impossibly elegant furniture from coppice wood."

Growing up fascinated by nature and plants, Sebastian says he first wanted to be a tree surgeon or a forester, but instead chose to study furniture and cabinet making at Lincoln University.

"Sebastian is a rarity: he crafts impossibly elegant furniture from coppice wood"

While he worked with timber as part of his degree, he found it odd how detached he'd become from the trees in their natural environment and yearned to reconnect with woodland.

He found his chance to go back into the woods to harvest his own materials when he went on to do an MA in design. "Everyone was talking about how good bamboo is as a sustainable material and I started to think about using hazel. I remembered people coming to our wood to coppice when I was younger but had never thought

about it as a product. I was determined to find a use for it on a large scale and give it a value."

THE KINDEST CUT

Coppicing is the process of cutting trees down, allowing the stumps to regenerate for a number of years (eight to 16 for hazel, depending how thick you want it) and harvesting the resulting stems. This form of silviculture was practised in woodlands for thousands of years. People made thatching spars, sheep hurdles and besom brooms. However, the tradition declined in the early and mid 20th century when many coppice workers were killed in the world wars. Cheap softwoods and tropical hardwoods were imported to fill the gap, and the rise of synthetic materials lessened demand.

Coppice wood never regained its popularity and much woodland is neglected as a result, although people such as Sebastian are bringing it back in vogue. "About half a million hectares of overstood [neglected] woodland that used to be coppiced is now in a bad state," says Sebastian. "We need to coppice for them to thrive. The natural life of a hazel tree is 60 to 70 years uncoppiced, but by cutting the branches off it every 14 years, the stool can live for hundreds of years. One of the oldest trees in the country is a coppiced lime at Westonbirt Arboretum in Gloucestershire, which is 2,000 years old."

As well as keeping a wood healthy and encouraging new growth,



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Sebastian carries hazel coppice in woodland in Kent; back at his London studio; putting the finishing touches to one of his chairs; his woodworking tools – two axes, a billhook and a froe





Sebastian uses a billhook to 'limb up' a hazel stem **RIGHT** Unusable wood scraps are pulped to make rustic lampshades like this one, attached to a steam-bent hazel stem



coppicing protects the character of the tree and encourages biodiversity. When an area of hazel is newly coppiced, for example, the sunlight reaches the open ground, warming the soil. This can cause an explosion of life from the seed bank and produce a profusion of wildflowers, which in turn attract bees, insects and butterflies.

BILLHOOKS AND YOUTUBE

In order to extract and work with timbers such as hazel, you need to use traditional green woodworking methods. Sebastian taught himself by reading an old woodland crafts book and watching YouTube videos, working out what to do with the simple hand tools such as draw knives, billhooks and froes. "I spent four months just cleaving wood (splitting along the grain) with a froe," he says.

In winter, Sebastian takes a team of volunteers along to fell an acre plot to stock up for the next year. They saw off the 4ft rods, limb them up (strip the twigs) using a billhook and stack these in a pile, which is collected and moved to Woolwich in the summer. In the workshop, Sebastian's team planes and band-saws the rods square and leaves them to season for six months.

Sebastian uses the wood to make rustic but modern-looking tables, chairs, benches, cabinets and desks as well as candelabras, lamps and hat stands. Some parts of the piece are barely touched – a raw hazel rod still with its bark and lichen intact, for example, is steam-bent to make the neck of a table lamp. Fresh green wood is cleaved into thin strips and woven

into seats. "I try to use every part of the tree," says Sebastian.

Coppice wood is not limited to hazel. Sebastian has worked with Sir Terence Conran and Berkshire-based furniture company Benchmark to design a collection partly made from coppice chestnut. The textural doors on his 'Shake' cabinet and sideboard are clad in cleft chestnut shakes (thin tiles). Plans are also afoot to work with the National Trust to make pieces using timber from its properties for specific gift shops.

TRY IT YOURSELF

Sebastian stresses that you don't have to own woodland in order to extract wood. "It's something anyone can do," he says. "You can buy a licence to extract from the Forestry Commission for £25. It wouldn't take too much digging to find someone who has hazel they want to get rid of, either. I have lots of people contacting me with donations now and I have more hazel than I can turn into furniture."

And getting out into our woodlands is surely what it's all about. "My favourite days are in the woods, harvesting hazel or having a party and whittling spoons with friends," Sebastian says. "I find woods quite spiritual. They're peaceful and humbling. The contrast to London couldn't be bigger." ☺



Rosanna Morris writes about travel, art and design. She is based in Somerset and can usually be found scribbling or walking her English pointer Flossie.



LEARN TO MAKE FURNITURE

MAKE SIMPLE FURNITURE West Dean College, West Dean, West Sussex

Learn basic woodworking techniques and how to use hand planes, chisels and other essential tools required to make the bench. From £321. 01243 811301; www.westdean.org.uk

GREENWOOD FURNITURE Dorset Centre for Rural Skills, Farrington, Blandford, Dorset

Working in locally coppiced hazel, learn the techniques of greenwood furniture by making your own chair, which can be taken home at the end of the weekend. £145. 01747 811099; www.dorsetruralskills.co.uk

INTRODUCTION TO FURNITURE MAKING

The CASS School of Design, Commercial Road, London

This one-day-a-week, 15-week course is an introduction to basic furniture-making skills. £825. 020 7320 1842; www.thecass.com

CHAIR MAKING Mallinson Woodland Workshop, Holditch, West Dorset

On this five-day course with Guy Mallinson, you start with a log and end up with your own post and rung chair, having learnt processes such as cleaving, draw-knifing and steam bending. £834.

01460 221102; www.mallinson.co.uk

WOODLAND CHAIR-MAKING COURSE, Brookhouse Wood, Bromyard, Herefordshire

This six-day course with Mike Abbott covers tools and techniques and the processes of cleaving, shaving, tenoning and steam-bending to make a chair. £450. 01531 640005; www.living-wood.co.uk



Learn to coppice

Find out about courses in coppicing around the UK at www.countryfile.com

Sebastian's furniture, from left: Lath coffee table, £560. Lath chair, £390. Shake cabinet, £2,950. For more coppice furniture, see www.sebastiancox.co.uk



Discover the Isle of Man on foot

Within its modest shores, encircled by the wild Irish Sea, the Isle of Man is home to a wealth of walks across a beautiful and diverse landscape. There's something to suit all ages and abilities, from gentle rambles to long distance footpaths. Plus with plentiful travel links with the UK and Ireland, the Isle of Man is the perfect place for a short break or more. Here are 5 walks to try on your next visit to the Isle of Man.



A stretch of the Raad Ny Foillan at the Island's southernmost point, The Sound, overlooking the Calf of Man.

01 Coastal Adventure (4.6 miles)

The Isle of Man boasts incredible coastal scenery, and the Raad ny Foillan (Way of the Gull) follows 95 miles of sea, beaches, cliffs and harbours around the Island. One of the most beautiful sections of the route takes in the beauty of the Calf of Man, the historic village of Cregneash and the wild waves at the Sound. A bird lover's dream, this walk gives you the chance to spot Ravens at the ancient Stone Age burial site of Mull Hill, Choughs around the wild reaches of Spanish Head and breeding Kittiwakes and Guillemots above the deep cracks of the Chasms.

02 Walk on the Wild Side (2 miles)

The Isle of Man is fast becoming famous for its unusual collection of wild wallabies! In the North-West of the Island there is a breeding colony of around



100 wallabies which began after a pair escaped from the Curragh's Wildlife Park. For a chance to spot them, head to Ballaugh where you can trek through miles of wetland and the outstanding Close Sartfield nature reserve for a chance to spot the elusive wild wallaby!

03 Railway Ramble (6.6 miles)

The railway walks are a series of 11 self-guided walks for you to enjoy along with a ride on the Island's historic Steam Railway. Alight at Ballasalla for a leisurely walk that covers beautiful countryside, rivers and open farmland. The trail takes you past Rushen Abbey, an ancient monastery from the 12th century, before heading into Silverdale Glen. Set on the Silverburn River, Silverdale offers an extensive children's play area and boating lake as well as a beautiful and secluded glen.



WIN a 3 night break to the Isle of Man

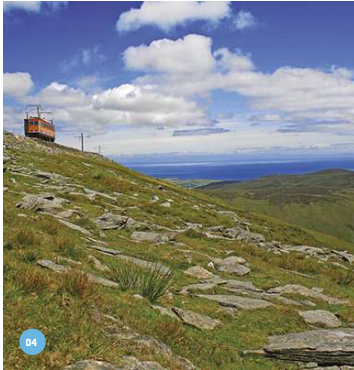
Find out how you have evolved as a traveller and you could enjoy a 3 night break on the Isle of Man. The prize includes return flights or ferry travel, 3 nights bed & breakfast, 2 activities plus 2 Transport & Heritage Explorer passes. To enter, complete the quiz at visitisleofman.com/competition (where terms and conditions can be found). Closing date for entries is 31.05.15. Entrants must have a Facebook account.



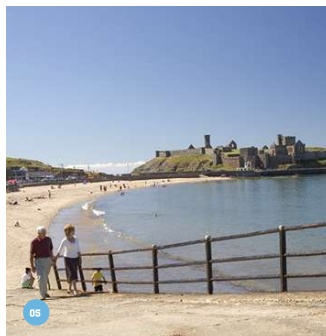
Babbling Glen walk featured in the Island's annual Walking Festival.

04 Heritage High Life (3 miles)

This walk takes you to the Island's highest point, Snaefell - the 'Snow Mountain'. Starting in the ancient village of Laxey, the walk follows a footpath along the deep valleys on the hillside to the base of the mountain. From here you can climb the steep ascent to the summit of Snaefell to see unrivalled views of England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales. At the top of the mountain you can catch the Electric Railway back down to Laxey village.

**Isle of Man****05 Across the Isle of Man (10.5 Miles)**

This easy going walk follows the old railway line from Douglas in the East of the Island to Peel in the West. Traversing the Island, you will see expanses of open countryside and a multitude of quiet leafy lanes. Finishing in Peel you can take a short walk over the harbour to Fenella beach where you can spot Minke Whales and Basking Sharks in the summer.

**Food and Drink****The Boatyard**

For the freshest local produce head to The Boatyard in Peel where you can feast on freshly caught seafood and fish brought in from the harbour opposite. Try the local Manx delicacy, Queenies, before heading out for a sunset stroll around Peel Castle.

**Patchwork Café**

For a quirky and laid back lunch pop over to Patchwork Café in Port St Mary and enjoy their 'yummy, seasonal and local' menu. The café also provides award winning breakfasts to set you up for a day's walking, including the classic Manx dish - Kippers on toast!

Where to Stay

All accommodation in the Isle of Man is rated for its 'walker friendly' status. As part of the 'Walkers Welcome Scheme' the accommodation must provide somewhere warm and dry to hang your wet clothing, a place for your muddy boots, maps, guidebooks, details of local walks and essential transport and weather information.

**Salmon River Apartments**

Situated in the heart of beautiful Laxey village, this converted riverside hayloft offers the height of luxury for walkers and wildlife spotters. A 5 minute stroll will take you to a sandy beach, the famous Laxey Wheel and the Island's Electric Railway. Sleeps 6 people from £875 a week.

**The Stable**

This beautifully converted Manx stone barn is located on a working dairy and sheep farm. The Stable has superb views of Port Erin and Port St Mary and is perfectly located for beaches, walking and the Isle of Man Steam Railway. Sleeps 6 people from £400 a week.

Festival Time!**Isle of Man Walking****Festival (11th-15th May)**

Now in its 11th year, the festival is gaining traction as a must-do event in the walker's calendar. With an astounding range of expertly guided walks for all abilities plus evening entertainment, the festival is a fantastic way to discover the Isle of Man on foot.

**Isle of Man Food and Drink****Festival (19th-20th September)**

The Isle of Man produces a diverse range of local produce, from cheese and ice cream to freshly brewed ales and Manx champagne! Head to the annual Food and Drink festival at the famous Villa Marina to sample Manx delicacies and watch famous chefs try their hand at cooking the local cuisine.

How to get there

Fly from: Belfast City, Birmingham, Bristol, Dublin, Glasgow, Gloucester, Liverpool, London (City, Gatwick & Stansted), Manchester, Newcastle.

Sail from: Liverpool, Heysham, Belfast, Dublin.

For more information, go to **visitisleofman.com**

Season of *wild blossom*

As light flows slowly into our woodlands and hedgerows, once-bare branches begin to bloom. The brief blossoming of rowan, wild cherry and hawthorn is a magical spectacle, wreathed in ancient folklore.

Phil Gates celebrates eight of our finest 'tree flowers'



Photo: John Pater

The hills are alive with the sight of spring...
a hawthorn tree blossoms in Swaledale, Yorkshire



Keep watch

For more spectacular spring wildlife, don't miss *Easterwatch* on BBC Two. See www.radiotimes.com for more details.

BBC TWO

Every season has its attractions, but none stirs such deep emotions as the arrival of spring, when the first hedgerow blossoms appear. It may be related to the way in which the stimuli that trigger bud burst – lengthening days and warmth of the sun – give us such a sense of wellbeing. The sights of unfurling foliage, the scents of flowers and the return of birds and insects whose lives are intertwined with them are reminders that we too have emerged safely from another winter, giving us the impression that we are reborn and that the world is alive with new possibilities.

But perhaps it's also deeply rooted in more pragmatic human instincts for survival. For our forebears, the billowing blossom would have brought relief and reassurance that the forest products they depended on – fruits, nuts, leaves for animal fodder and new woody growth for everyday use – would surely follow. We no longer need to forage to survive or rely on hedgerow herbal potions as our only source of medicines, but perhaps some echoes of that ancient urge to gather are still reawakened by the sight of branches weighed down with swags of blossom.

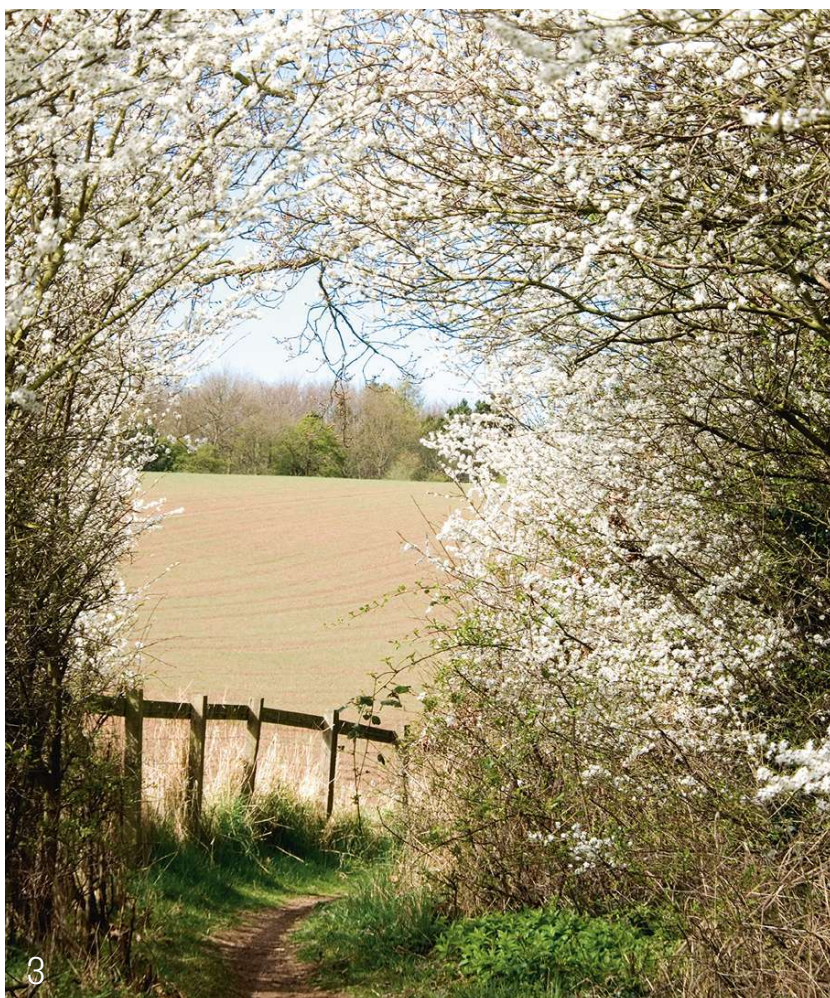
It's hardly surprising that a seasonal spectacle stimulating such visceral emotions and providing for the basic needs of rural communities has bequeathed a rich legacy of folklore. A walk along a hedgerow or woodland edge in spring is one where every flower tells a story. So here are 12 woody harbingers of spring, laden with blossom and mystical beliefs, regional dialect names and ancient uses...

1. HAWTHORN *Crataegus monogyna*

Other names: Quickthorn, whitethorn, may.

When and where: May; hedgerows and isolated trees.

Hawthorn hedges have formed enclosure boundaries since Roman times and the species has gathered millennia of folklore and superstition. Winter-flowering Glastonbury Thorn is said to be descended from Joseph of Arimathea's staff, which rooted and burst into flower on the Isle of Avalon. In Ireland, hawthorn trees are said to be fairies' trysting places. Bringing flowering branches indoors is believed by some to bring bad luck, perhaps due to their unpleasant scent, described by the poet Walter de la Mare as 'a deathly smell'. Isolated hawthorns grow into gnarled trees, full of character, and the species is the 'thorn' of many place names.



2. WILD CHERRY *Prunus avium*

Other names Gean, mazzard.

When and where April to May; woodlands and copses.

A confetti-like layer of petals on the ground is a sign of a wild mature cherry flowering in the canopy above, but young hedgerow trees also flower well when less than 10 years old. The most spectacular displays of blossom are on woodland edges, where low-hanging branches were once cut to decorate churches. The sweetly scented flowers are self-sterile so need bee cross-pollination to produce fruit, the flavour of which is very variable. Cut branches exude sweet sap that solidifies and was used as chewing gum. The native tree is the ancestor of the sweet cherry, whose cultivation was encouraged by Henry VIII.

3. BLACKTHORN *Prunus spinosa*

Other names Sloe.

When and where March to April; hedgerows.

Blackthorn flowers are densely clustered, so hedges covered in its blossom sometimes seem from a distance to be covered in a light fall of snow. It often blooms at the time when northerly winds bring bitterly cold weather with real snow, a period known to generations of country people as a 'blackthorn winter'. This may explain why sloe crops can be unpredictable – when cold weather prevents the bee activity that is essential for fruit production, there will be slim pickings for sloe gin fans in autumn. New spring foliage, picked and dried, was used to adulterate tea in Victorian times. Blackthorn's

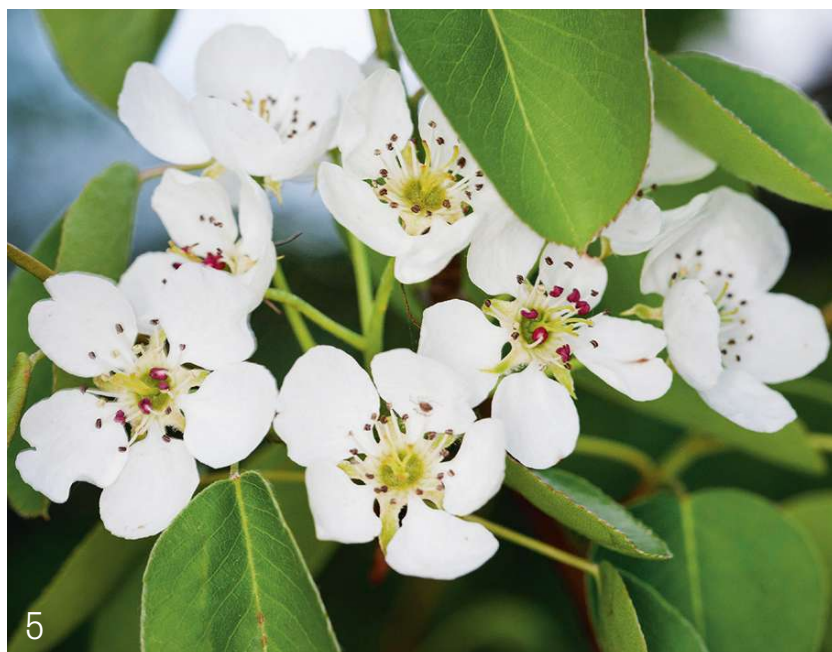


4. CRAB APPLE *Malus sylvestris*

Other names: Cultivated apple (*Malus domestica*).

When and where: Mid to late May; hedgerows, copses.

Genuine crab apple is an uncommon native, venerated by druids because it was the host of magical mistletoe. It has breathtakingly bitter fruits, only suitable for making vinegar-like verjuice, but village hedgerows and byways are often full of the pink-tinged blossom of cultivated apples that have sprouted from discarded cores. Old feral trees that produce good fruit would once have been valued as a communal resource, even subject to the ritual of wassailing. Pomatum, a country cosmetic, was made from crab apple pulp, lard and rose water.



5. WILD PEAR *Pyrus pyraeaster*

When and where From late March; trees in hedgerows.

Probably introduced by the Romans, wild pear has small, inedible fruits. Its fragrant blossom opens before the leaves expand and is carried in upright clusters, attracting bee pollinators. The cultivated pear *Pyrus communis* lacks the spines of the wild species; feral seedlings from tossed cores tend to revert to bearing poor fruit. Mature trees have a pyramidal shape and can live for 200 years. Hard close-grained pear wood is loved by wood carvers.

6. SALLOW *Salix caprea*

Other names Goat willow, pussy willow.

When and where March to April; hedges, wood edges.

Gathering male twigs as 'palms' on Palm Sunday is an old country tradition. In March, silver male catkins swell out of their bud scales and turn gold as their stamens elongate. Female trees have spiky green catkins but both sexes produce nectar, attracting bees, butterflies and blue tits. As one of its names suggests, goats like to eat the catkins. Willow bark infusions contain salicylic acid, the active compound in aspirin, and are an old remedy for aches and pains.



7. HAZEL *Corylus avellana*

Other names Lamb's tails.

When and where January to April; hedges and coppices.

One of the first blossoms to appear on bare twigs in spring. Old coppices, cut on a 7-10 year rotation for harvesting small wood, produce fine catkins displays. The nut crop depends on pollen carried on the wind to tiny carmine female flowers. A heavy nut crop can be stored for months if squirrels, nuthatches and dormice don't reach them first. Coppiced hazel was used to make everything from pea sticks to poles for wattle and daub walls, and for pegging down thatch. Diviners use forked twigs to locate groundwater.

8. ROWAN *Sorbus aucuparia*

Other names Mountain ash, quickbeam, witchen, cuirn.

When and where May; hedges, wood edges, solitary trees.

Few native trees are so richly endowed with folklore. Flowering rowans were planted beside cottage doors on May Day to prevent visits by witches, while crosses made from twigs were hung over doors on the Isle of Man. Scottish shepherds drove flocks through a circle of rowans to protect them from spells. The flat blossoms are composed of numerous tiny flowers with a musty scent that attracts pollinating flies. An exceptionally hardy tree, growing in mountain crags at higher altitudes than any other tree in Scotland.

• For more on wild blossom, see countryfile.com



Dr Phil Gates is a writer and keen wildlife conservationist. He teaches biology at Durham University and has authored 17 science books for young people.

THE SPRING WALKING GUIDE

Spring is the perfect time to get out and get walking. Whether you are going for a day or a week there is a lot of fun to be had on walking adventures but it pays to be prepared. Turn the page for inspiration on planning the perfect trip to some essentials to take along with you.



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White Cliffs & South Downs 5 nights – half board from £537

Walking the Wye Valley 7 nights – half board from £489

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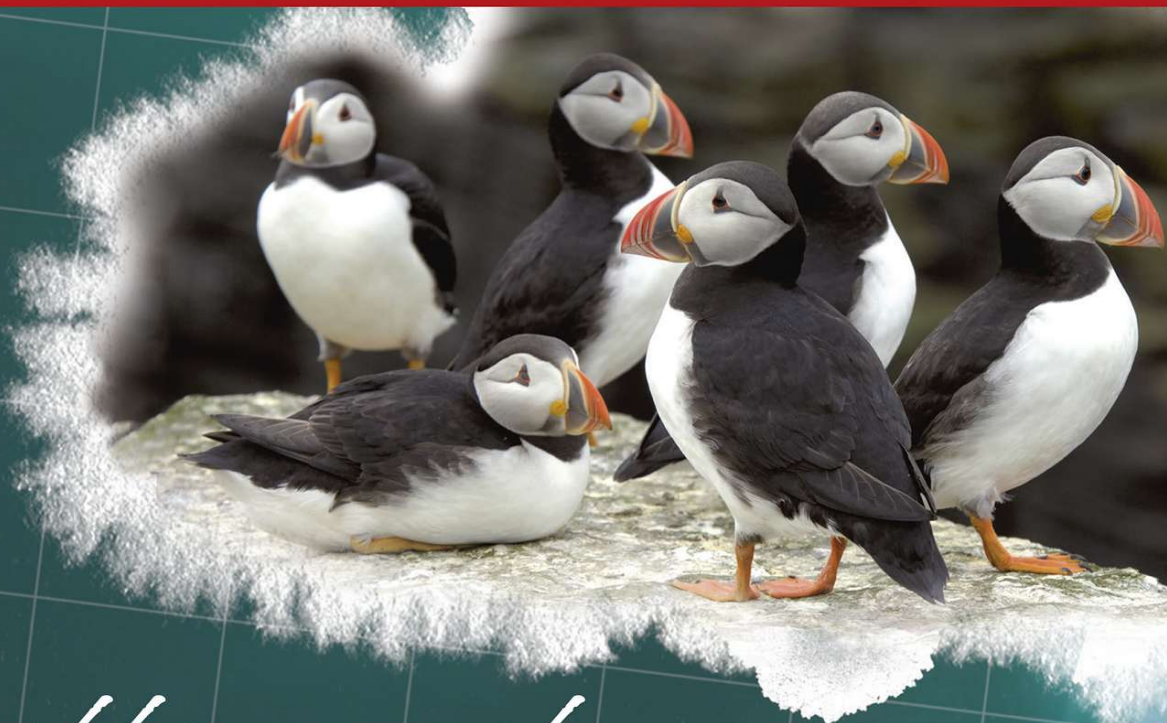
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HISTORICAL LEISURE WALKS OR CYCLE ROUTES

Enjoy a variety of trails around the UK formerly used by railway lines and the canal towpath network, now converted to footpaths and cycle tracks

Each book is printed in full colour with over 100 quality photographs and illustrations. It's a useful guide for those new to this kind of outdoor meander, but also worthwhile for experienced leisure cyclists/walkers who want to go somewhere different. Full routes are broken down into sections to allow for a series of walks, or else enjoy a longer distance adventure. You can even combine your journeys with a trip on the train, where available.

The Somerset & Dorset Railway The former Somerset & Dorset railway between Bath and Bournemouth, including branch lines.

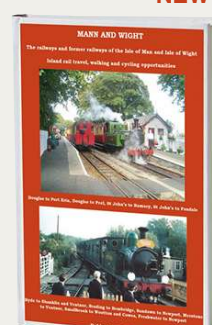
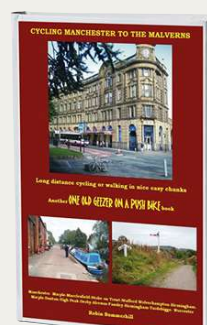
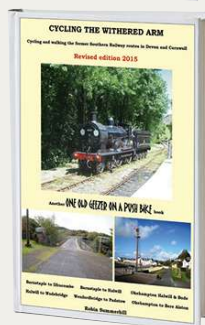
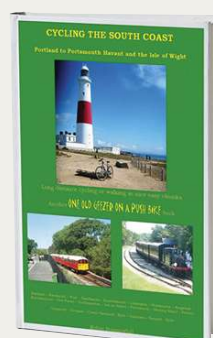
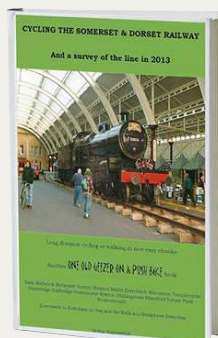
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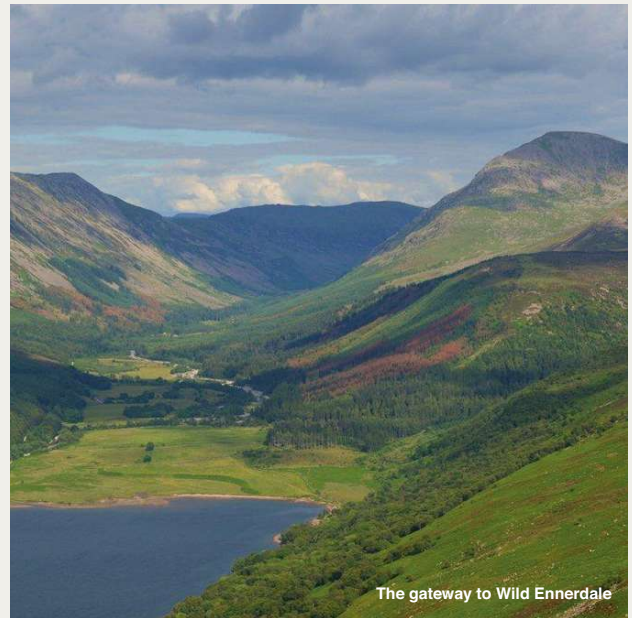
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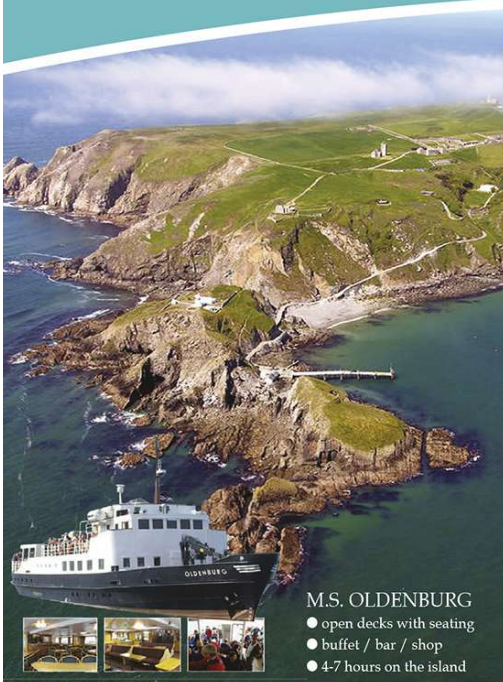
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April is one of the best months for getting out
into the natural world. This young roe buck was
spotted on the Berkshire Downs – see page 72

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Your handy guide to this month's Great Day Out

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01 DOWNLAND HIGHS

BISHOPSTONE, WILTSHIRE/BERKSHIRE

Walk through a wildflower valley and an organic farm famed for its wildlife riches, with **Fergus Collins** Photos: Elliott Neep



Choose a weekday for this early spring walk. You'll have an extra tingle of wellbeing when walking high up on the downs knowing that almost everyone else is beavering away at their desks in places such as nearby Swindon. You may even be able to see the commuter trains threading through the Thames Valley to London. Enjoy the freedom – we give ourselves so little of it these days.

The soft rolling chalk downs of southern England have a soothing power. Within half an hour's stroll on a bright, fresh morning – with springy turf beneath your feet and skylarks overhead – you'll be uplifted.

This walk takes you from a handsome medieval village up onto the Ridgeway – an ancient track that rises from 25 miles away to the south west at Avebury. The joy of this particular snippet is that it runs through a farm that has made strenuous efforts to support wildlife, so you get a taste of downland spring as it should be.

A RISE WITH THE SUN

Start early. For a proper spring walk, you need to feel the nip of cold at the beginning of the day – the gentle sun's warmth growing through the morning is part of the reward.

Also, by rising with the dawn, you'll see more wildlife, which tends to be much more active then – especially birds (see page 44). The other joy is that you can bask in a delicious glow of satisfaction for the whole afternoon, reflecting on

your morning's adventure.

If you stayed in the the Royal Oak in Bishopstone, you'll have a big breakfast to walk off. Turn left from the front of the pub and follow the lane back to the middle of Bishopstone, with its thatched cottages and a lovely duck pond. Go left again and then the second left onto Mount Pleasant. After about 200m, you rejoin the main road. Turn left and walk along this for about 100m then cross (this is often a busy road so take care) to take a

poor commuters. The lane running roughly east-west is the Ridgeway – an Iron Age commuter route.

B FLOWER-RICH PASTURE

Pause for a moment to look at the 'grass' in the broad fields here. Helen Browning sows the pastures with combinations of traditional meadow plants – including red and white clover, trefoils, herbs, sainfoin and lucerne – to give her animals a varied and balanced natural

diet. The side effect is that the grassland looks more colourful and varied than surrounding fields that contain only

“Pause to soak in the skylarks and the zingy jingle of corn buntings”

track south towards the downs.

The track isn't marked on OS maps but is a permissive path onto Eastbrooke Farm, a 1,330 acre organic farm run by the head of the Soil Association Helen Browning. Soon you'll find yourself in a charming dry valley with steep sides that has never been sprayed or ploughed and it's worth spending time looking for common spotted, fragrant, bee, pyramidal orchids and other typical wildflowers that thrive here. If it's not raining, pause and soak in the skylarks. Listen also for the zingy jingle of corn buntings – a rare bird that is doing well on Helen's farm.

The valley doglegs to the left (east) and, after about 1km, you'll find yourself climbing up the steep slope of the downs. It's worth it for the views at the top – to the north the Thames Valley and Oxfordshire Plain and those

blends of prosaic hybrid pasture grasses. The variety of herbage attracts a host of insects, which in turn draw birds, bats and other insectivores. **B**



HELEN BROWNING AT THE ROYAL OAK

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CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Eastbrook Valley – a cleft in the chalk downs with intense concentrations of wildflowers; pyramidal orchids are a regular sight; roe deer, badgers, hares and foxes are also common here; farmer Helen Browning points out the wildflower buffers to Fergus





Cattle, sheep and pigs can be found on Eastbrook Farm – part of a complex rotation system of crops and livestock that improves soil quality and fertility



CIRCULAR WALK FROM WAYLAND'S SMITHY

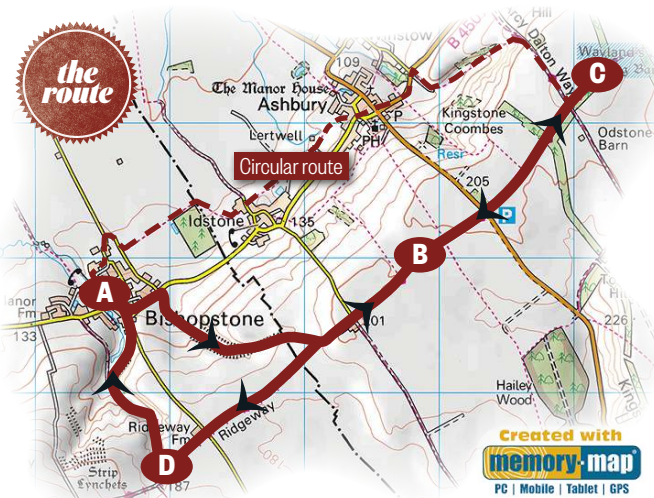
If you wanted to make a circular walk after reaching Wayland's Smithy, drop down towards the B4507 following the D'Arcy Dalton Way – then take a left through Odstone Coombes, which brings you down into Ashbury. Walk along the broad verge into the centre of the village and through it towards Idstone. Then turn right just before a phone box. After about 150m, take the footpath left into the fields follow it 1.5km cross-country to Idstone. Here, cross Featherbed Lane and then it's about 1km to Bishopstone. When you reach a lane, you're best off turning right then left at the next junction to avoid the busy road between Idstone and Bishopstone.

These 'leys' – all 750 acres of them – are part of a fascinating system of rotation that begins with livestock foraging and fertilising the leys, followed by root crops such as turnips. Livestock return to eat the roots before arable crops are sown when the soil is at its most fertile.

The proof in the pudding comes from photographer Elliott Neep. He's been so impressed by the sheer volume of wildlife on the farm that he's felt confident enough to launch a business based on wildlife photography tours. He's built hides and will lead people

on 'safaris' to help them develop their camera skills. His main targets are red kites, buzzards, foxes and badgers.

Standing on the Ridgeway, you've endless possibilities. If you're feeling up for adventure, head east for about 3.5 easy kilometers to reach the eerie Wayland's Smithy. Legends seep from the dark depths of this gigantic long barrow but there's just as much magic in the blackthorn and, in May, hawthorn blossoms in the hedges that flank the path. Keep a sharp eye out also for hares and, along the bases of walls and hedgebanks, stoats.



C FOLLOW YOUR TRACKS

From here, retrace your steps along the Ridgeway to Eastbrooke Farm and then continue on past Ridgeway Farm for another 250m till you come to a footpath leading north into a wooded coombe.

D BACK TO BASE

Follow this path back. Where it joins a track, take the more exciting right fork along the tiny valley past the barely visible medieval field workings (strip lynchets). After 500m, you'll arrive in Bishopstone.

I'd recommend a ramble around the back lanes and alleyways of Bishopstone, following tiny streams almost through gardens before ending up at the duckpond. You'll be just in time for lunch at the The Royal Oak. Sit with a beer in the garden of the pub, watch the chickens peck around your feet and reflect on an excellent morning's work.



Fergus Collins
is the editor of BBC
Countryfile Magazine
and downland addict.

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02 CHRISTMAS COMMON OXFORDSHIRE

Stroll through wildflower meadows alive with butterflies on the edge of the Chiltern Hills, says **Anthony Burton**

This is something of a switchback walk, up and down over wooded hills, dominated, like so much of the Chilterns, by stately beech trees. This stretch is carpeted with bluebells and patches of wood anemone in spring, making April the perfect time to explore it.

A AN ANCIENT TRACK

The walk starts at the hamlet of **Christmas Common**, leaving via Hollandbridge Lane. Once you leave the village behind, this becomes a broad sunken lane (originally part of an old Saxon road) as it

leads into **Queen Wood**.

As beech woodland has a dense canopy, certain plant species thrive in this shady environment. In spring, the woodland floor is bright with bluebells and speckled with the white flowers of wild garlic and wood anemone. Leaving the wood for open grassland, the view opens out to wooded hills and this is a good place to look out for red kites, with their distinctive triangular tails.

B CHRISTMAS HOLLY

Just before reaching the farm, turn right across a stile to enter College Wood, heading straight down into the valley.

At the clearing take the path on the left past a large holly tree. Climb the next wooded hill and, where tracks meet, follow the waymarked W19 path that leads down to the houses and on to the road.

Cross straight over and carry on into the next patch of woodland. Continue following this path downhill. Pass through a thin strip of woodland before the path winds through old coppice to reach the road.

C THE BUTTERFLY HILL

Turn right up the road and after a short way, turn right on to the footpath and continue

uphill to enter the woodland on the upper slope of Watlington Hill.

This area of National Trust land is noted for its butterflies, including the elusive, fast-moving silver-spotted skipper and the brown angus. The walk continues along the lower slope of the hill to the National Trust car park. Turn right at the road and then right again at the road junction to return to Christmas Common.

**Anthony Burton**

is a freelance writer and author of a number of guides to long distance trails.



Riding the crest of a wave: these daredevils are finally able to tick this famous tide off their surfing bucket list – the record for staying on is 9.25 miles

03 SEVERN BORE GLOUCESTERSHIRE

You don't have to travel as far as you might think to witness an epic tidal surge that calls out to white-knuckle adventurers, as **Emma Field** reveals...



The Severn Bore barrels its way up the River Sever about 260 times every year. It's quite a sight. And sound. A surge of water thundering through the peaceful Gloucestershire countryside, leaving honey-stone villages, startled sheep and banks

more used to otters and anglers in its wake. The crest can be ridden by up to 100 surfers, paddleboarders, belly boarders and kayakers.

Frequently labelled Britain's most spectacular natural phenomenon, the tidal wave is one of only about 60 in the world. And, luckily, spring is one

of the most spectacular times to witness this exciting event, or if you're feeling really brave, to attempt to ride it.

WHAT IS THE BORE?

In effect, the bore is the head of a great surge of water 12 miles long. At 15.4m, the **Severn Estuary** has one of the

world's biggest tidal ranges, and the rising tide funnels upstream into an ever-decreasing channel, getting stronger, faster and higher as the river gets narrower and shallower.

The wind, air pressure and height of the tide all affect the power of the bore. The spring



equinox brings some of the highest tides of all, although a smaller tide with favourable conditions can be just as impressive. With the right

“It’s often labelled Britain’s most spectacular natural phenomenon”

conditions, the bore can be up to 2.8m high, reach speeds of 12mph, and travel over 20 miles inland.

WATCH THE BORE

The bore really kicks off where the river narrows between the pretty villages **Awre** and **Frampton-on-Severn**,

shaped over hundreds of years by the changing tides.

It surges past **Arlingham** and **Newnham**

before narrowing to under 100m at **Minsterworth**, whooshing past **Stonebench**, under the A40 Overbridge and

along the home stretch to cut through **Maisemore** village.

There are three five-star bores (the strongest kind) around the spring equinox. Your best bets are the morning ones on Saturday 21 and Sunday 22 March. The other bore is at night so you won’t see much from the banks. Check **www.thesevernbores.co.uk** for exact times.

The best places to spectate are the rocks behind St Peter’s Church in Minsterworth, Stonebench on the east side of

ABOVE Be sure to grab a good spot to watch the wave tearing along the banks of the Severn
BELOW The bore looks even more dramatic from the air – this was a rare five-star wave in 2010

the river, and Overbridge for a birds-eye view. You can see the wave of bigger bores break around the bend on the opposite bank downstream of The Severn Bore Inn (**www.severnboresinn.co.uk**), Minsterworth, which usually opens early for three-star-plus bores (call ahead to check).

RIDE THE BORE

The bore is one of the longest rideable waves in the world, an opportunity first recognised by Colonel ‘Mad’ Jack Churchill, who made his own board and became the bore’s first surfer in 1955. Today, the record for the longest stand-up Severn Bore surf goes to local Steve King, who managed 7.6 miles (and a further 1.65 miles prone), in March 2006.

Surfing the bore is an incredible experience, but one for skilled surfers only. Steve Potter, in-house surfer at **www.thesevernbores.co.uk**, has surfed it at least once a month since 2004, and raves about what makes this ride so special: “You surf shoulder to shoulder, sharing the same wave with people from all over the world. You’re surfing a continual tide through the countryside – it’s surreal!” he says.

Find a personal guide at **www.thesevernbores.co.uk** and check safety guidelines at **www.gloucesterharbourtrustees.org.uk**, which include details of the most hazardous stretches. Or simply marvel at it from the banks.



Emma Field
grew up in Gloucestershire and is now editor of VisitEngland.



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Walk

GRADE: **MODERATE** › DISTANCE: **5.5 MILES** › TIME: **3.5 HOURS****04 DEEPDALE** DERBYSHIRE

Neil Coates wanders through captivating countryside that could have been designed for botanists, geologists and landscape historians



Wild garlic's distinctive aroma permeates the springtime air at Topley Pike in the great wooded chasm of Wyedale. A stony path forges up past the quarry here to reveal an astonishing hidden gorge cleaved into the White Peak. Deepdale is the best of a rich hand of flowery dales to the east of Buxton; a rolling revelation of wildflowers below towering cliffs and crags designated an SSSI.

As you emerge on to the limestone plateau, tracks lead to secluded **Chelmorton**, with old pubs and cottages enveloped within medieval fields, before plunging back to delectable **Wyedale**.

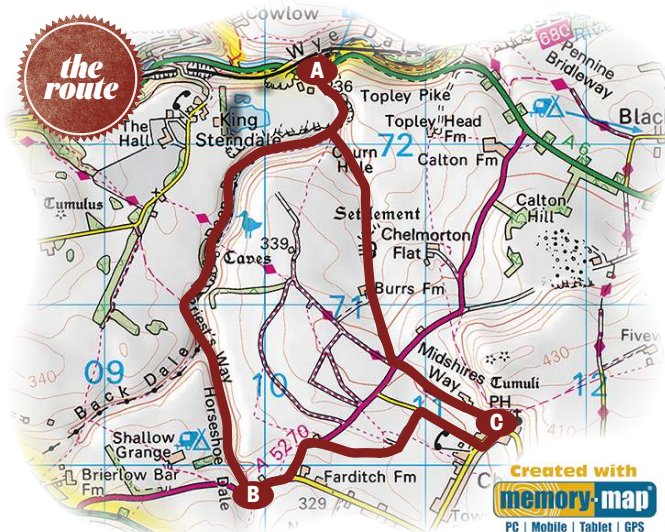
A BEAUTIFUL BLOOMS

Cross the A6 to the waymarked Chelmorton path, immediately beside the quarry access road. After 400m, keep right up steps at the fork, entering **Deepdale** past a slurry reservoir. All hint of industry dissipates as the path, often very rough underfoot, continues its gradual climb up the gorge. Depending on when you visit, you may see violets and bellflowers; catchfly and rockrose; cowslips, harebells and countless early purple orchids amid meadowsweet and cow parsley. Loads of butterflies, too.

Ashwoods bubble across the precipitous slopes as the way passes below the imposing Thirst House Cave – look for fossil crinoids (stem-like lily corals) in the tumbled rocks hereabouts.



Look out for distinctive purple orchids from April onwards – up to 50 flowers can appear on one spike



Passing out of the Nature Reserve, the way soon forks left up **Horseshoe Dale** along the Priest's Path. Ignore a side dale on the left, presently gaining the main road through a gaggle of barns.

B FOLLOW THE WALL

Turn left; disregard the Chelmorton turn and, in

another 250m, opposite a water treatment plant, take the fingerposted walled track on the right. Where this opens into a field beside trees in 400m, aim ahead-left to climb a corner stile and jig right, then left up another walled track amid these ancient strip-fields. Walk this to a tarred cross-lane. Turn right to nearby

Chelmorton; then left towards the top of the village.

C MAKE YOUR WAY BACK

Head left along the lane opposite Church Lane (for the Church Inn continue uphill another 75m). Fork left at Shepley Farm and continue to the main road. Cross into the walled track opposite-right; then keep ahead field-side to pass just right of Burrs Farm.

Head through stiles to a field-road into Access Land; keep ahead down the gradually narrowing walled pasture towards the trees marking the head of little **Marl Dale**. Descend this before drifting right on the quarry-edge track back to the start.

**Neil Coates**

is a writer whose interests include walking, climbing and the countryside.



GRADE: **MODERATE** › DISTANCE: **7.5 MILES** › TIME: **4 HOURS**

05 THE PENTLAND HILLS MIDLOTHIAN

As Scotland begins to thaw, these rolling hills outside Edinburgh grant spectacular spring walking and far-flung views, reveals **Keith Fergus**



Sitting on the outskirts of Edinburgh, the Pentland Hills grant some of the finest walking in central and southern Scotland. Clear springtime light means views stretch to the Southern Highlands and there's wildlife aplenty.

A MAKE A START

From Threipmuir car park, turn left and take a single-track road past **Red Moss Nature**

Reserve. Cross Redford Bridge, over Threipmuir Reservoir, then climb steadily through an avenue of beech trees to a junction.

Keep left for **Penicuik** and **Glencorse**. Once past the entrance of **Bavelaw Castle**, cross a stile and follow a grassy path southeast across a field. A stonier path then enters the deep defile of **Green Cleuch**. This section runs beneath the slopes of **Hare Hill** and **Black**

Hill. After crossing two stiles, continue alongside the **Logan Burn** waterfall then cross it via a footbridge. Walk towards a large house but turn right just before it on to the Kirk Road.

B SEE FOR MILES

A steep climb heads southeast. Once over a stile keep going up to a col between **Carnethy Hill** and **Scald Law**. Turn right from the Kirk Road, cross a stile then take a steep path south-

west onto Scald Law's 579m summit and enjoy the breathtaking views.

C KEEP CLIMBING

A good path descends then ascends steeply onto **East Kip**, granting a fine view of Scald Law. A final steep pull leads onto **West Kip's** airy ridge and a fabulous panorama of all 16 Pentland peaks. Drop down the path to gain a junction at The Red Road.



D BOGGY TROUSERS

Turn right for **Balerno**, follow a (sometimes boggy) track west then north across a scenic section of open moorland. Once through a gate, the track continues left of a wall, granting fine views of the Firth of Forth.

E FINISH THE LOOP

Walk to Bavelaw Woods. Go through the gate, then turn right on to a single-track road. After a few metres go left, back on to the outward-bound route, and retrace your steps to the start.



Keith Fergus

loves the mountains and coast... and all things outdoors.



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Price includes:

- Three nights in your choice of Bruges/Brussels hotel
- Return Eurostar from London St Pancras
- Full day tour around the main points of interest in Flanders Fields

Price based on 4 Leopold Hotel Brussels on 8 May.*



Brussels from £179pp

Known as the centre of European culture, this city famous for its delicious Belgian waffles and world-famous beer also boasts more than 90 museums, beautiful parks and fascinating walks – offering something for everyone.

Price includes:

- Three-night stay in a choice of Brussels hotels
- Full breakfast
- Return Eurostar travel from London St Pancras
- Add Brussels sightseeing bus tour, one day ticket from £19pp

Price based on 4 Leopold Hotel Brussels on 8 May.*



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06 LOST GARDENS OF HELIGAN

ST AUSTELL, CORNWALL

Marvel as spring starts to rise and shine in ancient woodlands dotted with budding works of art, says **Nicola Smith**



As nature awakens from its winter snooze, discover the sculptures of the Lost Valley – such as Mudmaid by Sue and Pete Hill

The Lost Gardens of Heligan have an almost ethereal charm that bewitches you. Sprawled over 300 acres, the Lost Gardens' history is well-documented. They lay dormant and forgotten for over 70 years after the estate – the ancestral home of the Tremayne family – lost many of its staff in the First World War and fell into gradual decline.

The gardens were slowly and painstakingly brought back to life by Tim Smit and his team, who began work in 1990 and finally unveiled it to the world again in 1992.

It is one of Europe's largest garden restoration projects, and welcomed its five millionth visitor in 2014. Yet it is still a work in progress.

April is a beautiful time to visit, as sweet Williams and daffodils are in full bloom and the gardens continue to emerge from their winter sleep. It has many faces, from its prolific vegetable garden managed in a Victorian style, to its walled flower garden, Italian garden and even a wild jungle – a sub-tropical valley that overlooks the fishing village of **Mevagissey**.

LANDSCAPE ARTIST

But one of the most enticing areas is the 80 acres of ancient woodlands. Stroll along the sheltered Woodland Walk and you will come across some striking works of art, hewn from nature itself.

Created by local artists, the **Giant's Head, Mudmaid** and **Grey Lady** are woodland

sculptures that sit eerily, yet enchantingly, watching as you wend your way along.

The **Lost Valley**, opened in 1997, extends to 30 acres. Here, you can lose yourself in the serenity of nature, wandering among – and marvelling at – the towering ancient trees and abundance of flora and fauna, with only the murmurings of the nearby Dexter cattle to disturb you.

When you have finished, refuel in Heligan's café. It uses many of the vegetables grown on site, as well as bread baked at the Heligan Bakery. A perfect end to the day.



Nicola Smith has been a freelance journalist for over 12 years and is based in Cornwall.

Stay over



THE LLAWNROC

Just 4.5 miles away, in the tiny seaside village of Gorran Haven, is the Llawnroc hotel. It has enjoyed a remarkable rebirth, opening in 2011 following its conversion from a rundown building. Today, it combines cosiness (it only has 18 bedrooms) and luxury, offering spacious rooms and handmade furniture. **The Llawnroc Hotel, St Austell, Cornwall 01726 843461 www.thellawnroc.co.uk**

07 GLORIOUS GARDENS

BEAULIEU PALACE HOUSE AND EXBURY GARDENS, HAMPSHIRE

Rhododendrons, azaleas, camellias – indulge in a riot of spring colour among these beautiful blooms, says **Emma Field**



Explore secretive corners and dark pools, lit up by a blaze of camellias and rhododendrons



Beaulieu means 'beautiful place' and, come spring, it's hard to decide which part of the attraction is most deserving of the moniker: the mass of flowers blanketing the banks of the dry moat surrounding 13th-century Palace House, or the adjacent informal Wilderness Garden, designed by John, 2nd Duke of Montagu in the 1770s.

Fifteen varieties of daffodil trumpet spring's arrival, accompanied by thousands of snowdrops, crocuses and bluebells, and a walk through the colourful, sweet-scented gardens will chase off any lingering memories of winter.

While there, visit two exhibitions opened by Sir Stirling Moss on 5 March at the National Motor Museum – Grand Prix Greats displays track cars and memorabilia, and Road, Race and Rally tackles rallying and hill climbing.

GARDEN OF EXCELLENCE

If you're still craving spring blooms, head 10 minutes down the road to Exbury Gardens. Their magnolias and 250-plus varieties of camellias will make your soul soar.

In spring 2014, Exbury was awarded a 'Camelia Garden of Excellence' certificate – one of only 30 presented around the world – and the 2015 display is set to be spectacular, with two Camellia Walks planted in the 1930s and 1996 alongside the 2014-opened Gilbury Lane garden. For more springtime attractions nearby, see www.thenewforest.co.uk.



Gloucestershire girl
Emma Field
is now editor of
VisitEngland.

08 WATCH BLACK GROUSE LEK

LLANDEGLA AND RUABON MOOR, DENBIGHSHIRE

Head to wild, sweeping moorland to witness an increasingly rare and fantastically dramatic courtship dance, says **Julie Brominicks**



On Llandegla and Ruabon Moors in the Esclusham and Ruabon Mountains, bog-ice and snow-pockets can linger late into spring. The wind can be sharp but the light sparkles like frost and the sun rises into a wide sky. A shelter-belt of young conifers grows between the moors and the Coed

from whinberries and heather. Hen harriers and owls cruise over the heather rides, as do nightjars in summer dusks. And sometimes there's a stirring in the heather – because this is also black grouse country.

Black grouse are an endangered species. Under threat from habitat loss, their declining British populations

are confined to Scotland, the Pennines and North Wales. But on Ruabon Moor their numbers are

increasing, thanks to the conservation work done by partners of the Black Grouse Recovery Project – RSPB Cymru, Natural Resources Wales, The Wynnstay Estate, Denbighshire County Council, UPM Tilhill (who manage the plantation), and Oneplanet

Adventure (who manage the Coed Llandegla mountain bike trails, visitor centre and café).

UP WITH THE BIRDS

Be sure to pack an alarm clock to make the very early start – 5.30am! Wrap up in plenty of warm layers and don some sturdy shoes before heading out into the fresh morning air.

It all becomes worth it as you creep through the forest among a shimmering symphony of goldcrests, siskins, warblers and crossbills, with rosy light tingeing the rustling tree-tops. Step from between the dark pines as if through velvet curtains onto the moor, with the sun rising ahead like a tinned apricot.

The stage is set for a performance – pour yourself a hot drink from your flask and let the lekking begin.

Partial to mountainous woody spots, black grouse

prefer sheltered areas of open space – they like the edges of woods and the moors, which provide them with their diet of juniper and whinberries, catkins, heather shoots and cottongrass.

Permanent residents, they gather in flocks in winter, roost in heather and lay their eggs on the ground. The females or 'greyhens' are rufous brown. The males – 'blackcocks' – are glossy violet-black with white wing-bars and roguish-looking scarlet wattle eyebrows. Startled from the heather, they fly like plump inland puffs.

LEKS FACTOR

The grouse are quiet for most of the year, but the blackcocks become gregarious in spring. This is when they 'lek' – the name given to both the courtship dance and the courtship arena – a strip of bare ground mowed into the heather. The greyhens gather at the leks in large groups. And the blackcocks put on a show, filling the air with bubbling fruity warbles, strutting and leaping and lifting their double lyre-shaped tails to reveal their frilly white under-feathers.

If you'd like to witness the black grouse lek, RSPB Cymru runs guided walks on Sundays from 22 March till 3 May at £10 per head. To book a place call Vera McCarthy on **02920 353 008**, or email **vera.mccarthy@rspb.org.uk**.

“The males fill the air with bubbling, fruity warbles, strutting and leaping”

Llandegla plantation of spruce and lodge-pole pines. Water bubbles beneath blanket bog, flushes of reeds and tussock grass. The moors are a palette of umber and russet, mottled with white snow and black peat. Young juniper, rowan and birch trees protrude



It's almost the paso doble of the bird world – take in the passion and drama of a black grouse lek



Julie Brominicks is a Snowdonia-based landscape writer and walker.

Black grouse are strong fliers and can travel long distances on the wing – you may get to spot one taking off



09 KILLERTON DEVON

Lose yourself among brilliant blooms and birdsong erupting around a remnant volcano at this stately home and gardens, says **Mark Rowe**



You could set your calendar by the way winter is finally overrun by colour, birdsong and scent at this south Devon estate in April. At the heart of spring's victory parade is Killerton Clump, a remnant volcano that rises abruptly above the pink-washed historical seat of the Acland family.

Sweet chestnut and sycamore blossom are the outriders heralding the turn of the season here. A little lower is the beech avenue and the estate's exotic collection. Look out for the Indian bean tree, the last species here to blossom and the first to lose its leaves. You may even catch the handover between late

camellia and early rhododendron on the easy, short paths here.

Behind the Clump lies the **Plains**, an open raised space that is unusual – it resembles an African savannah with wide open grasslands, interspersed with singular hawthorn, beech and sycamore trees.

PERFECT PICNIC SPOT

There's a lot of deadwood here, and some of it is perfectly positioned for you to sit down with a picnic and watch the day unfold, with plenty of butterflies to spot, and the arrival of migrants such as pied flycatchers, swifts, swallows and housemartins.

Don't miss magical **Deodar**

Glen, just behind Killerton Clump and below the Plains. You could argue that spring passes this glade of evergreen cedars by, but the higher sun turns their needles a more intense green and bluebells shelter at their feet.

The beauty that underpins the landscape escalates a few notches as new life blossoms elsewhere across the estate. The duck pond in **Front Park** hums with dragonflies and damselflies. Catch the scent of the ornamental trees in the arboretum and beech terrace.

Walk a little further, into **Columbjohn Wood** and the pungent waft of wild garlic seeps into the pores of your boots. In the depths of the wood, peer beyond the

green-brown crocodile skin of the sycamores and the floor is lit up with bluebells.

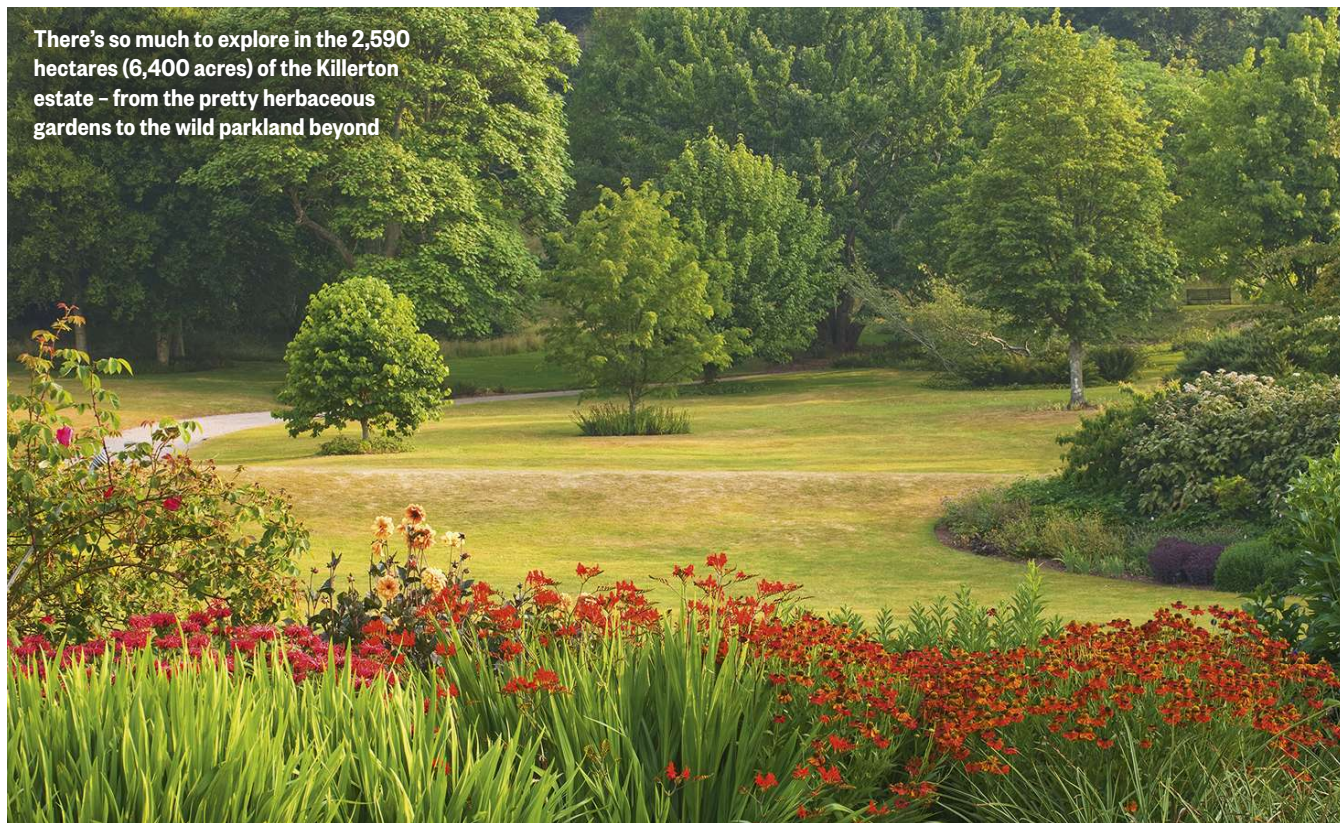
THE BEAT OF NATURE

Keep going beyond the wood and Killerton has one more seasonal ace to play. Beyond the chapel where the Acland family is buried, the footpath meanders towards the bank of the River Culm. You may catch woodpeckers travelling to their nests in the hollows of solitary oaks. Like a steady drumbeat, they are a heart-warming signal of the oncoming march of spring.



Mark Rowe is a journalist specialising in travel, wildlife and environmental issues.

There's so much to explore in the 2,590 hectares (6,400 acres) of the Killerton estate – from the pretty herbaceous gardens to the wild parkland beyond



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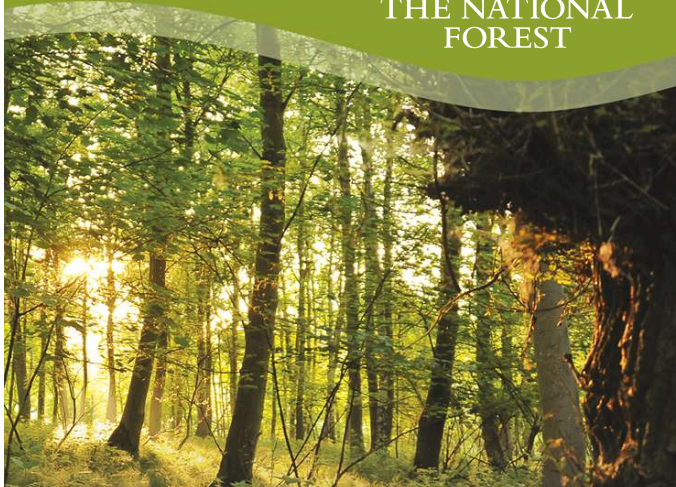





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Follow the pretty, daffodil-covered bank of the River Arrow through the village of Eardisley – look out for the 17th-century dovecote

10 BLACK AND WHITE TRAIL

BEGINS IN LEOMINSTER, HEREFORDSHIRE

As flowers blossom along the route, take a drive through black-and-white-clad villages in a tour of architectural history, with **Simon Whaley**



The heart of an oak tree is almost as hard as iron, making it the ideal house-building material. Herefordshire's 40-mile Black and White Trail is the perfect opportunity to see a forest of these traditional timber-framed buildings, and with daffodils, flowering magnolias and the first sight of the county's blossoming orchards, this Black and White Trail is anything but monochrome.

Timber-framed buildings are constructed in a way that if you

could pick them up and turn them upside down they would remain intact. At the tour's start in **Leominster**, the intricately carved timber Grade II listed Grange Court may not have been picked up like this, but it was moved from its town centre location and, in 1859, rebuilt beside the Priory Church.

The tour heads west, along the A44 and A4112, through **Dilwyn**, to **Weobley**, with its 185-foot tall church spire – the second highest in the county (topped only by Hereford's Cathedral).

Broad Street has several timber-framed buildings, but the oldest is the Manor House, first built around 1320, in Bell Square. When a bakery caught fire in 1943, several timber-

“The perfect opportunity to see a forest of traditional timber-framed buildings”

framed buildings in Broad Street were destroyed: a reminder of their vulnerability.

The trail saunters through **Sarnesfield**, where builder of

Leominster's Grange Court and carpenter to Charles I John Abel, is buried, before it reaches **Eardisley**.

DICKENSPIRATION?

Several of Eardisley's timber-framed dwellings date from the 15th and 17th centuries, but a

19th-century literary plot can be seen in St Mary's Church.

Two plaques recount the life story of the Barnsley family, the foundations of which bear a

strong resemblance to the plot of *Bleak House*. Dickens is known to have visited Eardisley. No timber-tour is complete, without a small diversion to Eardisley's Great Oak, a fine specimen reputedly first recorded growing in 1086.

The trail heads northwards to **Kington**, the English town on the Welsh side of Offa's Dyke, before turning eastwards, along the A44, through **Lyonshall** to **Pembridge**.

Many buildings here have numerous vertical oak uprights, not essential for the building's structure, but ideal for showing off the owner's wealth: oak was an expensive building material.

PEMBRIDGE NAILED

Pembridge Church has an unusual 13th-century detached wooden belfry, and next to the New Inn pub stands the old Market Hall. Look for two stones in the south-west corner, struck when traders agreed a deal, hence the expression, 'paying on the nail.'

From Pembridge the tour drives to **Eardisland**, where the timber-framed cottages are reflected in the tranquil waters of the River Arrow. Look out for plenty of daffodils and spring blooms at the roadside.

Don't miss the 17th-century Georgian dovecote, with its 900 nesting alcoves. Although many of these timber-framed properties date back to the 14th and 15th centuries, the tradition of painting oak timbers black is actually a Victorian idea.

It's then a short drive back to **Leominster** (pronounced Lemster, and spelled like this on old mileposts) or **Llanllieni**, to use its Welsh name.



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Cute timber-framed cottages line the route; Grange Court, formerly Leominster Market Hall was built in 1633; cross the River Arrow on this stone road bridge



Simon Whaley
is a freelance British
travel writer, based
in Shropshire.

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**Photo
of the
month**

FROSTY FIELDS

By: Victoria Fitzwater

Where: Banbury, Oxfordshire

"I drive along this area when I take my children to and from school.

Nestled in the landscape is the canal that links Banbury to Oxford. Sadly this land has been bought for a large housing development."

THE PRIZE Our winner receives Snugpak's Chrysalis 3 (RRP £89.95) sleeping bag, which weighs just 1600g and shrinks down to a remarkable size of 26x22cm when packed away, making it incredibly easy to store and take on trips. Offering superb protection in temperatures as low as -5°C, it has the added bonus of an expandable jumbo zip baffle, which provides extra space for the user, and a reading light in the hood for extra convenience! www.snugpak.com



▼ SIMPLY PARCHED

By: David Crabbe Where: Aylburton, Gloucestershire

"I spotted this squirrel at 2.30pm at my local hide, as it drank for a few seconds. It's the first time it has done that and not normal to see for a squirrel. The brook is about five feet wide, and I'm seeing very varied wildlife in the hide area."



REED BUNTING >

By: Ronald Baber Where: Amwell Nature Reserve, Hertfordshire

"There were several birds on the feeders at Amwell but this reed bunting seemed to prefer the natural supply readily available."



▲ HARE ALERT

By: Louise Gibbon

Where: Richmond, Yorkshire

"I arrived early – after a few hours this brown hare came by and seemed 'on the alert'. The light was fantastic."

▼ SILENCE AND SNOW

By: Paul Dixon

Where: Ennerdale, Cumbria

"From the footpath on the north shore, though the trees at Stoat Fell and Pillar, with snow on the fell tops."



< ICED CANDY

By: Julia Amies-Green

Where: Exmoor

"Here on Exmoor we haven't seen as much snow as elsewhere, but the cold weather has nevertheless provided some amazing scenes, such as this frosty wild rambling rose."



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HAROLD PARK IN THE WINTER

By David Zdanowicz

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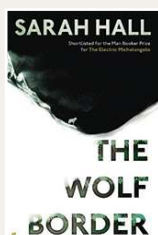
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SARAH HALL

FABER, £14.99, ISBN 978 0571258123

In this striking novel, Rachel Caine returns to the Lake District after 10 years on an Idaho reservation, in order to manage a controversial scheme to reintroduce the grey wolf to the Cumbrian countryside. The project is the brainchild of the eccentric Earl of Annerdale, whose philanthropic conservationism sits against the backdrop of a thorny political stage, one on which he's looking to play a lead role – Scotland

is on the verge of independence, thus England must redefine its fells and dells. Rachel, meanwhile, has her own regeneration to attend to – she's soon to become a mother and, in order to embrace her future, needs to make peace with her past.

As is to be expected from the twice Booker-nominated author, Hall captures the rural setting with a stark and vital poetry. The female wolf, "her fur the colour of the earth and rocks; she is tawny as the landscape, and utterly congruent"; the image of a majestic forest spreading out like "bright lungs"; or

the seasonal spice that hangs in the air: "Moorland, peat, ferns, water and whatever the water touches: the myrrh of autumn."

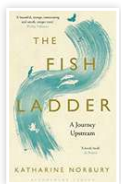
Hall folds wilderness into the deepest fabric of the novel: as the Earl declares: "British nature is in the British soul". *The Wolf Border* is a powerful and compelling portrait of the relationship between humans and their environment but, above it all, reigns the enthralling grey wolf: "Matchless predators; they exist supremely."

Dr Lucy Scholes, literary reviewer



BOOK THE FISH LADDER

KATHERINE NORBURY
BLOOMSBURY, £16.99, ISBN 978 1408859230



If you're looking for the definitive nature-writing classic on freshwater fish, this isn't it. Instead it's a moving and sometimes shocking account of one woman's quest for her origins and her identity woven into expeditions to discover the secrets of a handful of British rivers.

In a similar vein to Helen Macdonald's *H Is For Hawk*, escaping into the outdoors provides solace, distraction, beauty and perspective – and Katherine Norbury has a lot to contend with. Her life in Spain is torn apart when her husband's work dries up at about the same time that she has a miscarriage.

The family return to Britain in a rather stricken state, but the solidity and comfort Norbury derives from her home in the Llyn Peninsula is undermined by the unsettling knowledge that she is an adoptee with no clue to who she is. Is she a Celt? Does she belong in Wales?

As she searches for the sources of rivers with her nine-year-old daughter, she finds clues to her own origins – as well as experiences many entertaining encounters with wildlife and people.

It's no accident that salmon appear regularly, glimpsed in dark pools returning to their home rivers to spawn. A fish ladder is a feature on many salmon rivers to help the migrating fish up and over manmade obstacles – and it's a brilliant analogy for Katherine Norbury's quest.

Fergus Collins, editor

TV BRITAIN'S FAVOURITE FOODS: ARE THEY GOOD FOR YOU?

MONDAY 13 APRIL, BBC TWO

The sheer amount of dietary advice we receive these days is dizzying. And all too often contradictory. Dairy products will give you a heart attack, we were told in the 1980s, yet milk, cheese and yoghurt are also rich sources of protein and calcium. How are we to decide what to bring home from the supermarket?

Step forward Dr Alice Roberts with a documentary that starts with statistics about what we actually buy and eat, and then looks more closely at nutritional facts and scientific studies surrounding our favourite fresh ingredients.

It's an approach that throws up some intriguing insights. For instance, recent research suggests that milk may actually be more effective in aiding rehydration after exercise, so we're best to forget expensive sports drinks. We also learn how vegetables may help us look more attractive and that cheese, so feared by dieters for its high calorie content, has a secret ingredient.

Jonathan Wright, TV reviewer



TV SECRET BRITAIN

BBC ONE, 9PM
MARCH / APRIL

This three-part series takes in Wales, Yorkshire and the Highlands of Scotland, as Ellie Harrison and Adam Henson hunt for amazing landscape secrets inspired by suggestions from *Countryfile* viewers.

They meet countryside characters with extraordinary stories and stunning sites to share, including tumbling waterfalls, concealed views and mysterious valleys,

caves and lochs. Along the way, Adam and Ellie share secrets about themselves, and reveal some surprising skills.

Ellie, who used to be in a folk band, has to sing for her supper in Britain's highest pub, so performs 'Ring of Fire', while Adam, who was a keen potter as a teenager, makes Roman-style clay pots near a Roman villa that was uncovered on a Yorkshire Farm. Adam also must find a hidden way up Ben Nevis, while Ellie hunts for the elusive 'Morag' monster, lurking in Loch Morag, which is deep enough to hide the Eiffel Tower...

BOOK UNCOMMON GROUND

DOMINICK TYLER

GUARDIAN FABER, £16.99

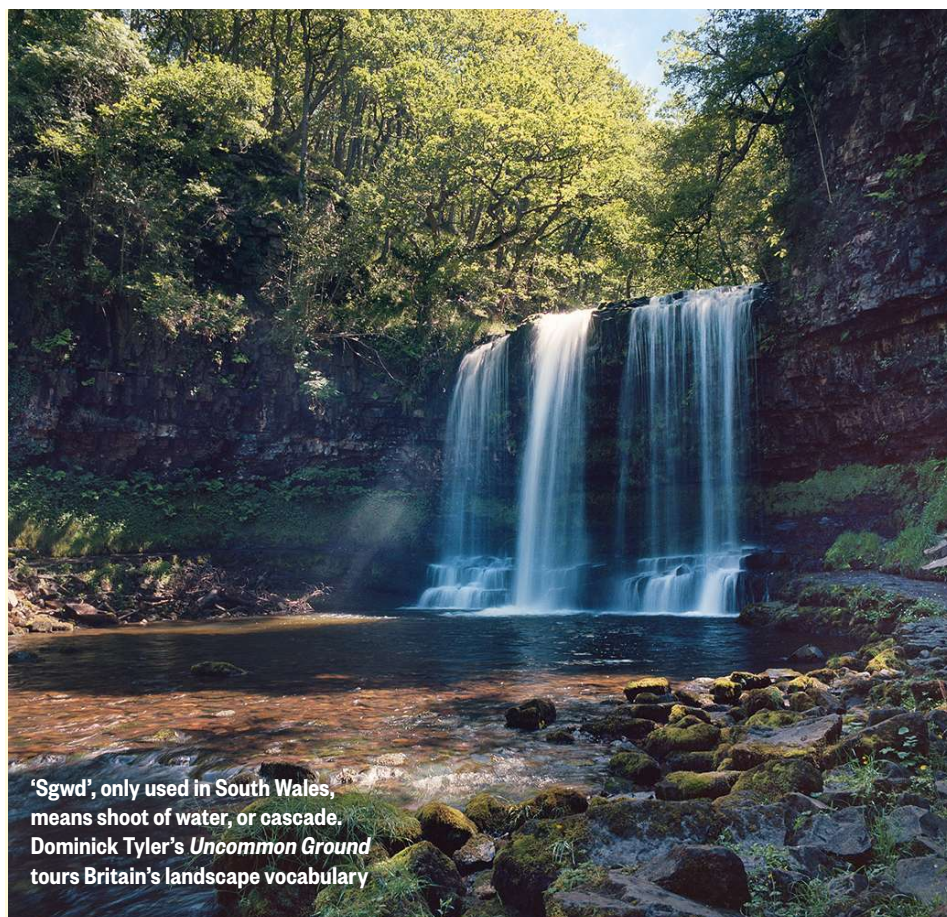
ISBN: 978 1783350483



Dominick Tyler has conjured up a visual glossary of our words of landscape, with each unusual, poetic

and particular word accompanied by a beautiful photograph of the landscape to which it refers. So 'jackstraw' sits opposite a shot of a storm-felled tangle of trees, stacks of cracked slate illustrate 'shivver', while striking broken moorland depicts 'peat hag'. Water glitters over a 'doake', the shallow platter-shaped indentation left when a flounder or similar fish has shuffled off its lurking place, while 'thundereggs' – hard crystalline balls set in surrounding rock – squat solidly in the sun. The result is an enchanting illustrated dictionary of nature. One to pour over.

Maria Hodson, production editor



'Sgwd', only used in South Wales, means shoot of water, or cascade. Dominick Tyler's *Uncommon Ground* tours Britain's landscape vocabulary



Country tech MUST-HAVE APP

FOREST SEEDLINGS

Identifying tree and shrubs as seedlings is no easy feat, as they are often strikingly dissimilar to their adult states, but it is a key skill for those interested in woodlands. To aid the process, experts working with the Forestry Commission have helped devise a digital field guide identifying tree and shrub seedlings in Britain.

The app includes nearly 100 species found in our forests and woodlands, with images of leaves and seedling features. The search tool allows users to find species by both their common and scientific names, and to identify seedlings by filtering key characteristics. Locations are automatically logged using the device's GPS, and information can be recorded in the 'field notes' tool. **£1.49, app available on iOS and Android**



ALBUM BONXIE

STORNAWAY

RELEASED 13 APRIL



Four-person band Stornaway have always been passionate about, and heavily influenced, by wildlife and birds in particular, and their third album *Bonxie* (after the Hebridean name for the great skua) resonates with a joyfully wild atmosphere, a jangle of guitars, electronica, sweeping strings, a handful of kitchen implements and 20 different birds calls.

Prior to recording the album, lead singer Brian Briggs, who also holds a doctorate in ornithology, moved to an Atlantic-facing house on the Gower peninsula. Here he found himself battered by severe storms while writing in his den, *Bernie the campervan*. The tidal saltmarshes surrounding the house attracted migrating birds, such as Brent geese, whose contact calls open the album.

The album evokes sweeping landscapes, sudden storms and quietly contemplative moments while also remaining chirpily melodic and modern, with overtones of indie rockers Grandaddy. The opening song *Between the Saltmarsh and the Sea* has lovely harmonies, magnetic percussion and a cascade of birdcalls, while *Get Low* is a great pop song with an infectious chorus and soaring heart, and *The Road You Didn't Take* presents a gorgeous lament to the paths left untravelling. An invigorating, uplifting album.

Maria Hodson, production editor

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Farmhouse kitchen

A FAVOURITE SEASONAL RECIPE TO ENJOY THIS MONTH

CURE YOUR OWN BACON, BY GILL MELLER

If you like cooking, then having a slab of your own bacon on hand is an absolute joy. Whether I'm braising big chunks of it with venison and orange, or frying thin rashers until crisp with scallops and sage, I find it brings amazing flavour. Making bacon is incredibly rewarding and easier than you might imagine. I don't use any artificial preservatives – just good-quality sea salt, a little sugar and a handful of aromatics to dry-cure the pork belly. Then I hang it somewhere cool to air-dry.

INGREDIENTS

> 2.5kg piece of pork belly, ribs removed

For the dry cure

> 300g fine salt

> 200g soft brown sugar

> 2 tbsp lightly crushed coriander seeds

> 2 tbsp cracked black peppercorns

> 2 sprigs of rosemary, leaves stripped

> A small bunch of thyme, leaves only, roughly chopped

> 2 garlic cloves, peeled and thinly sliced

1 Combine the dry-cure ingredients, including the herbs and garlic, in a large bowl. Scatter a thin layer (about 50g) in the bottom of a shallow plastic box or tray. It needs to be big enough to take your piece of pork belly, but small enough to fit in the fridge. Lay the pork belly on the cure then scatter over another handful of cure (another 50g or so). Give the meat a quick massage all over, working in the cure, then pop it in the fridge. Keep the remaining cure in an airtight container.

2 The next day, pour off any liquid that's been drawn out of the meat. Apply a second layer of dry cure in the same way and return to the fridge. Repeat the process three more times (i.e. five days in total), using about 100g cure each day.

3 Rinse the cure from the bacon under cold running water then pat the bacon dry with a clean tea towel. Hang it up to dry outside, out of direct sunlight, the rain and any animals partial to a little salted pork. A porch or lean-to is a good place, or a small meat safe hung outside in the tree.



Recipe from
**Gill Meller's
Pigs & Pork**
(Bloomsbury,
£14.99)

4 I like to air-dry my bacon for a couple of weeks before eating, to allow it to become firmer and develop flavour. The less humidity in the air, the better. Once the bacon is dry, you can keep it wrapped in a clean tea towel in the fridge for several months. If you make bacon regularly, you might like to invest in a slicer that enables you to cut thin, neat rashers. If you leave your bacon to hang for several months until it's firm to the touch, it can be eaten without cooking, like a good pancetta – try it thinly sliced with figs and honey.



Go online for more seasonal treats

For foraging guides, recipes, homemade bread and other delights: www.countryfile.com/countryside/seasonal-food

Your countryside

HAVE YOUR SAY ON RURAL ISSUES

Share your views and opinions by writing to us at:

Have your say, BBC Countryfile Magazine, 9th Floor, Tower House, Fairfax Street, Bristol BS1 3BN; or email editor@countryfile.com,

Tweet us [@CountryfileMag](https://twitter.com/CountryfileMag) or via Facebook www.facebook.com/countryfilemagazine

*We reserve the right to edit correspondence.



CORNWALL 1 DEVON 0

As I settled down to browse through the February issue of *BBC Countryfile Magazine (Devon vs Cornwall)*, the photo of Mousehole on the cover jumped out at me. It has to be a coincidence but yesterday I booked a cottage for a week in June in this loveliest of harbour villages.

Cornwall has a very special place in our hearts. My late mum was born in Falmouth and we enjoyed many summer holidays there as children. My husband and I spent our honeymoon at Trebarwith Strand on the north coast in 1972. We have since returned many times to both the north and south coast with our own children. We discovered Kynance Cove on the Lizard Peninsula one glorious sunny day in 1984 and it became a firm favourite with us all.

Last July, our youngest daughter was married on the beach at Lusty Glaze near Newquay. So for me it has to be Cornwall (though Devon is lovely, too!). As we cross the border and see the "welcome to Cornwall" sign, we always feel as though we are coming home!

Barbara Picknell
Horsham, West Sussex

letter
of the
month

SECRET POWER OF NETTLES

'Grow perfect vegetables' in the March issue was an interesting read. I've found a homemade nettle fertiliser that can give exceptional results, particularly with tomatoes. You simply collect your nettles, chop or crush them, putting them in a container weighed down with a stone and then add water. Four weeks later your nitrogen-rich feed will be ready to go. Just dilute it with water at a 1:10 ratio and who knows, maybe you too could be a champion veg grower.

Cate Sibley
Little Stretton, Leicester



Editor Fergus Collins replies:

Thanks for this great tip. I have many nettles in my garden so will use some to create this super fertiliser. Of course, I'll leave a few patches for wildlife, too...

THE PRIZE

Our winner receives this great bundle of outdoor essentials, courtesy of Primus, including a four-season mug, wide-mouth drinking bottle, meal set and 0.75 litre vacuum flask. Primus, the Swedish outdoor cooking brand has been engineering quality outdoor cooking stoves and products since 1892. Look out for their cutting edge new Lite+ range of one-person stoves in five rustic colours due to launch this spring. Visit: primus.se



THE 'BEAUTY' OF PREDATORS

We love your magazine and all the colour and interest it gives us, especially in winter days. But the March issue was spoiled for us by the 'Opinion' article from Sara Maitland.

She presented a balanced article about important issues, such as the public's changing opinions on which animals are considered 'good' and 'bad'. But to describe one of nature's killing acts (a stoat preying on a rabbit) as 'privilege' and 'beautiful' makes me reflect on what sort of mind can write or feel that? Alright, if it has to be

described in such detail, but finding it as described leaves us cold. Very cold.

Peter Haywood
Poulton-le-Fylde, Lancashire

Sara Maitland replies: *I am sorry to have so upset anyone, but I would defend my use of both 'privilege' and 'beautiful' in relation to watching a stoat kill a rabbit.*

There are about half a million stoats in the UK; this means there are probably over a million stoat kills a week. Yet most people have never seen a stoat and very few have seen one hunt successfully. I have



Reader Q & A

“What are the current UK regulations on muck spreading? How close can the ‘muck’ be spread to residential homes and gardens?”

Chris Skeggs, Wellington, Somerset

Tim Relf from *Farmers Weekly* replies:

Spreading animal manure is generally deemed an acceptable agricultural practice. DEFRA has issued ‘Code of Good Agricultural Practice’ guidelines as to where and when it’s not desirable, plus there are ‘cross-compliance’ rules that farmers have to adhere to if they wish to qualify for subsidies.

Rather than working to specific minimum distances regarding houses, council officials tend to consider whether a smell is deemed to be extreme and persistent – in which case they could pursue enforcement action.

never heard of anyone, except me, to see this from her own kitchen. Since all encounters with animals in the wild are a gift and are also, I believe, good for us, then surely this amounts to a privilege.

Beauty is in the eye of the beholder, but one definition of what makes something beautiful is that it is perfectly ‘fit for purpose’. I find stoats lovely and their beauty has evolved for the purpose of hunting.

I also find a peregrine falcon on the stoop, gannets fishing and trout on a lake rising to a fly beautiful. They are not by any means the only things I find beautiful in nature – many of the others are gentle, but that is not the point. My purpose was to suggest that any attempts to apply human morality to animal behaviour were dangerously mistaken. I would hold to that.

FORGOTTEN HARES

Countryfile on 9 February examined the fallout of the Hunting with Dogs

Act 10 years on. One of the animals benefiting from the act is our iconic and appallingly persecuted brown hare, listed in a 2011 report as one of our native species most at risk of extinction by 2050. The brown hare has declined nationally by over 80% since 1880 and is already extinct in some areas.

A third of hunts in England and Wales are hare hunts (nothing to do with foxes) and repeat polls by Ipsos Mori show that now 88% of people, both urban and country dwellers, are opposed to the use of pack dogs to kill hares just for human entertainment.

The 2004 Act also outlaws the hare coursing, where two fast dogs are set after one hare, often accompanied by betting on the dogs involved.

John Rimington BSc
Technical Liaison Officer,
Hare Preservation Trust



Social media

What you’ve been saying on Facebook and Twitter

Countryfile on 9 February investigated how the countryside has changed 10 years after the hunting ban

f Val Sakseide: Long may hunting continue. People from all manners of society enjoy it.

f Robert Godwin: Keep the ban and ENFORCE IT for a change.

f Adam Winston: I’m not pro or anti hunting but I do object to the hunts riding across my farm and over my crops, when they have been asked many times to keep off.

t Eddie Haydock: Just because something is an age-old tradition doesn’t make it right.

Countryfile.com Alec: I am 100% happy with fieldsports. I was brought up hunting; my children will be too.

Following our Devon v Cornwall issue we asked: do you put jam or cream first on your scones?

t Tom Heap : If clotted, cream first. It’s the density.

t Granny Jack: Jam jam jam!

t Charlie M: Got to be cream first. I like nice equal layers #gameofscones #devon.

t Alex Jevon: I’m definitely in Britain. Only here would a Twitter feed be overtaken with debates on jam or cream first on a scone. #jamorcream

t Neil Ollerton: Can I get a vote for peanut butter?

Take shelter

What do you need to keep dry and warm during a spring night in the woods? Part two of our woodland kit feature reveals all...

Words Joe Pontin Photography Sean Malyon

For campfire reading try **Wild Cooking** by Richard Mabey (Vintage, £9.99); **The Wood Fire Handbook** by Vincent Thirkettle (Mitchell Beazley, £14.99); or **Woodlands** by Oliver Rackham (Collins, £14.99).

Base All Weather Tarp, Ultimate Survival, £27.95. True adventurers sleep beneath this simple shelter, which also doubles up as an aluminium coated thermal blanket when needed. 01539 721032, www.whitbyandco.co.uk

Bivvi bag, £64.95, and **Travelite Full sleeping mat** (not visible), £64.95, both Snugpak. Stay dry in a bag made of a waterproof, breathable fabric. The mat keeps you comfortable and warm on cold ground. 01535 654479, www.snugpak.com

Nordic EMT 3-season sleeping bag, Mammut, £90. Designed to see you through from cool spring nights to chilly autumn ones. Includes a hood that fits snugly round your head. 01625 508218, www.mammut.ch

Halo 200 tent, Vango, £170. The great thing about this tent is the two porches (one for your gear, one for cooking). It's fairly easy to assemble, using three equal-sized poles. When packed it's bulky and, at 3.5kg, not the lightest 2-person tent around, so you'll want to split and share the load if you are backpacking. 01474 746000, www.vango.co.uk

Kettle, £15, and **aluminium plate**, £6, both by Trangia. No-nonsense and tough, in lightweight aluminium. The kettle takes up to 1.4 litres of water. 01474 746000, www.vango.co.uk

Hot & cold thermal mugs, Sigg, £19.99 each. These small flasks keep drinks seriously hot (or chilled) for hours. Each holds 30cl of liquid – one mug's worth. Larger sizes available. www.sigg.com/en_uk/



Chunky hat, Bridgedale, £19.99.

Knitted from 50% cosy merino wool and lined with fleece for an extra boost on chilly woodland nights.

0116 234 4646,
www.bridgedale.com

Powersync SolarWrap Mini,

Bushnell, £75. Hang this off your pack to keep your phone charged. Rolls up into a lightweight, pocket-sized cylinder. 0208 391 4700,
www.bushnell.eu/uk/

Mac in a Sac Waterproof Poncho, TargetDry, £27.99.

Long enough to keep legs dry, this is great for spending hours outdoors – and affordable too.

02890 790 588,
www.targetdry.com

Sten fleece, Fjällräven, £90. Light, soft and warm, with reinforced patches on the shoulders.

A good back-up layer for spring and summer – other colours available. 02392 528711,
www.fjallraven.co.uk

Camp mug, Stanley, £17.

Large (473ml) thermal cup whose selling point is robust good looks rather than long-lasting insulation.

0116 234 4646, www.burton-mccall.co.uk

Vintage 20L backpack,

Fjällräven, £95. Traditional looks (leather straps, soft fabric) combine with up-to-date mesh frame (which keeps your back cool in summertime). 02392 528711, www.fjallraven.co.uk

Coby Kids Camouflage Fleece Jacket, Seeland, £29.99.

Great for woodland fun – whether wildlife-watching or playing hide and seek. Sizes from four to 16. 07912 934389,
www.seelanduk.co.uk



More online...

For more woodland camping gear ideas – and further details of all products – go to www.countryfile.com

Country puzzles

RACK YOUR RURAL BRAIN WITH THESE WILD AND WONDERFUL GAMES

COUNTRYSIDE QUIZ by Maria Hodson

answers at bottom of opposite page

1) In which poem does this line appear? "The waves beside them danced, but they outdid the sparkling waves in glee"

- ☐ a) *Daffodils* by William Wordsworth
- ☐ b) *The Wild Flowers' Song* by William Blake
- ☐ c) *Loch Leven* by William McGonagall
- ☐ d) *Wayside Flowers* by William Allingham

2) What can an orange tinge on the area above a hedgehog's furline be a sign of?

- ☐ a) Disease
- ☐ b) Mating season
- ☐ c) Age
- ☐ d) Buddhism



3) What is the name of this wildflower?

- ☐ a) Marjorie
- ☐ b) Pasqueflower
- ☐ c) Spring gentian
- ☐ d) Fritillary

4) Which UK animal has the most sensitive hearing?

- ☐ a) Barn owl
- ☐ b) Red fox
- ☐ c) European mole
- ☐ d) Earwig

5) Whose idea was it to change the clocks for British Summer Time?

- ☐ a) William Willett
- ☐ b) David Lloyd George
- ☐ c) HH Asquith
- ☐ d) Early Bird

6) On an Ordnance Survey map, what does a small pink triangle represent?

- ☐ a) Bus or coach station
- ☐ b) Nature reserve
- ☐ c) Youth hostel
- ☐ d) Fairy kingdom

7) What are baby red squirrels called?

- ☐ a) Kids
- ☐ b) Kittens
- ☐ c) Mittens
- ☐ d) Calfs

8) What does the Latin name for the daffodil mean?

- ☐ a) Bright
- ☐ b) Intoxicated
- ☐ c) Delightful
- ☐ d) Poisonous



9) Which aspect of the yellowhammer earned it the old name of 'scribble lark'?

- ☐ a) Its feathers
- ☐ b) Its feet
- ☐ c) Its eggs
- ☐ d) Its writing

10) Which common vegetable is a member of the nightshade family and contains harmful toxins in its foliage that must not be consumed?

- ☐ a) Onion
- ☐ b) Beetroot
- ☐ c) Potato
- ☐ d) Mr Bean



WHERE IN BRITAIN? by Jonty Clark

Can you identify this county?

Jonty®



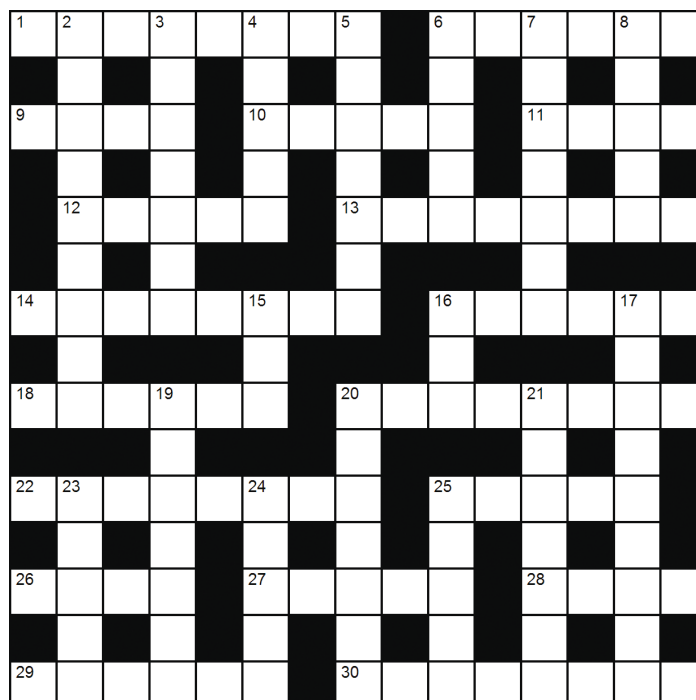
answer at bottom of opposite page

COUNTRYSIDE CROSSWORD

by Eddie James

ACROSS

- 1** Arran mountain – nanny tumbled? (4,4)
6 Legendary bare-back (and more) rider (6)
9 Urge on horse in fox's pursuit (4)
10 Spirit made from rye – OK, Dave almost drunk! (5)
11/30 Practising sartorial good taste in Derbyshire's annual 'spring' decoration? (4,8)
12 Scottish turnips found in lane, Epsom (5)
13 Pasture turned over by edge of farm – against river's current (8)
14 Figures collectively seen on a Sculpture Trail? (8)
16 One year-old sheep gets egg hot (6)
18 Think Pennines includes a Berkshire beacon? (6)
20 Salmon or trout? Sigh, fame is ruined (4,4)
22 Island in the Outer Hebrides – er, nearby, possibly (8)
25 Harass hunting dog (5)
26 Strong desire found in sturgeon (4)
27 Almost vertical like a cliff – here's rocks (5)
28 In Denbigh I've one of many in an apiary (4)
29 Town linked with Lynmouth, possibly only outside National Trust (6)



30 See 11 across.

DOWN

- 2** Kent town's poultry breed trooping off north (9)
3 Sailor joins little Albert for village at one end of Kintyre Way (7)
4 First woman's holding a house martin's nesting site (5)
5 Herefordshire market town ruled by eccentric! (7)
6 Horned ruminants – making good traditional horse feed! (5)
7 Lake District fell – drag cow off (3,4)
8 Fishbourne's famous Roman building is a palatial one! (5)
15 Northumberland river on Reiver's Way – access land nearby, initially (3)
16 Bad actor's meat? (3)
17 Beer is found on the coast of this part of the SW county! (4,5)
19 As the smell of garlic is – good in punnet, possibly (7)
20 Lake Bala is in this Welsh county (7)
21 Drives birds from cover and reddens with embarrassment (7)
23 As Jersey Royal potatoes are, seasonally (5)
24 Tree secretion from sycamore's inevitable (5)
25 Husky-sounding hack, say (5)

CROSSWORD SOLUTIONS

MARCH

ACROSS 8 Earth
 9 Harrogate 11/12/29
 Hot cross bun 13 Graft
 14 Reseeds 16 Bramble
 18 Whitsun 20 Dabbles
 22 Rooster 24 Sparrow
 26 Camel 30 Stonechat
 31/28 Cader Idris

DOWN 1 Menhir 2 Grit
 3 Thickets 4 Shoots
 5 Loggia 6 Bala
 7 Weathers 10 Rosebud
 15 Sligo 17 Baler
 18 Worm-cast 19 Norwich
 21 Brassica 23 Tiller
 24 Sprats 25 Wintry
 27 Moor 29 Beds

FEBRUARY

ACROSS 1 Spores
 5 Drought 10 Sand
 11 Glove 12 Rime 13 Twitter
 14 Hovers 15 Smithies
 17 Straw 19 Inn Way
 21 Airedale 23 Thirst
 26 Cowpats 28 Brit
 29 Larnie 30 Gain
 31 Reading 32 Totnes

DOWN 2 Plantsmen
 3 Red list 4 Sight
 6 Reeth 7 Upriver
 8 Homer 9 Morris
 dancers 16 Icy 17 Sir
 18 Wiltshire 20 Worsted
 22/24 Draught horse
 25 Talon 27 Wheat

 **Online quiz**
 Visit our website
 for more puzzles **www.countryfile.com/quiz**

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Jul-Dec 2013
 39,219

ANSWERS: QUIZ: 1 a, 2 c, 3 b, 4 a, 5 a, 6 c, 7 b, 8 b, 9 c, 10 c WHERE IN BRITAIN: Herefordshire

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1



With 660 acres of woodland, wetland and farmland habitat, Pensthorpe Natural Park has been conserving wildlife habitats for over 27 years. The Pensthorpe Conservation Trust based at the Park is a charitable trust involved in national conservation programmes to 'actively save species'. These partnerships include Operation Turtle Dove and the Great Crane project as well as a Corncrake and Red Squirrel Re-introduction project.

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2

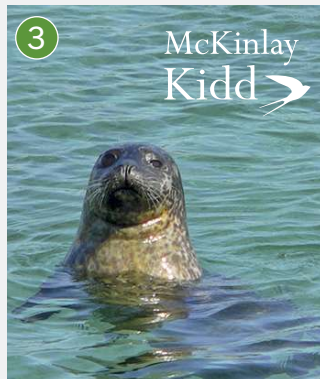


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3



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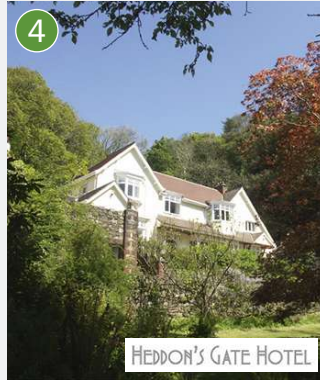
Britain has some wonderful wildlife spectacles – here are six of the best places to get closer to nature



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4



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5



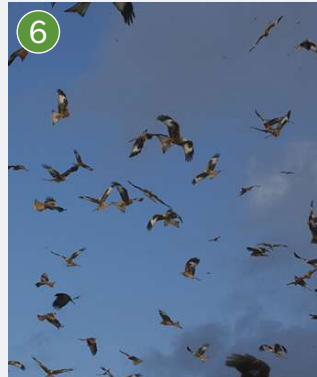
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6



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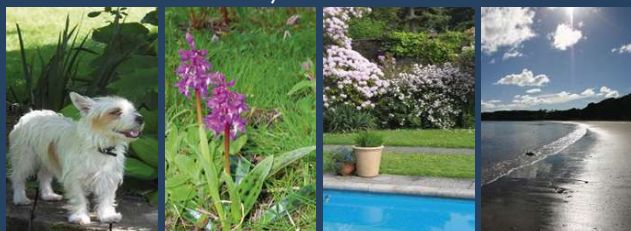
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The wartime hero and the land he fought so vigorously to defend



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my countryside

Martin Shaw

The star of *Inspector George Gently* discusses the thrill of viewing the land from an old aeroplane, the beauty of barn owls and a secret army wildlife paradise

I grew up in Birmingham, where you're never really far from the countryside, even though it's such a big city. As soon as we got a car, when I was 11 or 12, we were out in the country like a shot.

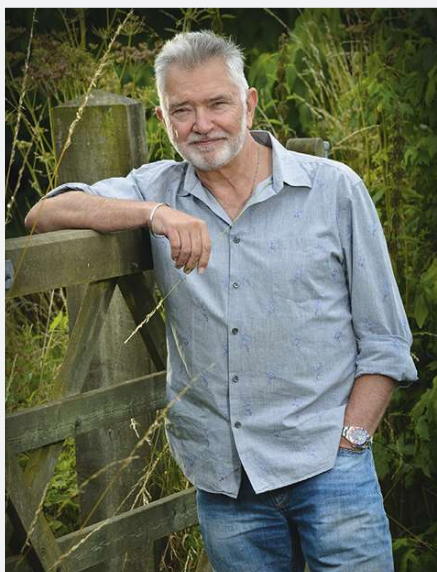
My love of the countryside was something I got from my father.

My brother and I would ridicule him slightly. He would walk past a tree and say, "Oh, can you feel that?" And we would go, "Feel what, Dad?" And he would place his hands on the tree and say that he could feel this extraordinary energy and force coursing up through the tree. My brother and I used to go, "Hmm, yeah, sure, OK..." but of course he was right.

I did *The Chief* series in Norfolk from 1990-95. At that time I had a house in Stoke Newington in London and I rented a farmhouse while I was working. When the series was over I found that I was much happier in the countryside than in London, so I just stayed.

I like to fly old aeroplanes. You really only notice the ravages of the 20th and 21st centuries when you're close up. If you're flying over rural areas, you're really looking at Britain the way it was 100 years ago, or maybe even more. It's also an extremely difficult, demanding pastime that focuses the mind intensely; and so you have this wonderful combination of looking at the beauty of the countryside and doing something that you have to really struggle to do.

In Norfolk, we have the Stanford Training Area, land annexed by the British Army in the Second World War. A few years ago, I had access to it because I knew the commanding officer. You would have been absolutely astonished by how beautiful it was. It was like going back into the Garden of Eden. The wildlife and the plant life were happier and healthier with explosions and bombs and aeroplanes and artillery than with the way we live our lives now.



I've also got a place in the wilds of Scotland and that's my real retreat because it's extremely remote. You can't even get to it without a four-wheel drive. There's an absence of mental noise. The remoteness engenders a sense of calm, the absence of competitiveness.

I see wildlife on an almost daily basis.

Every morning I come down and there are birds just outside my window on the birdfeeders I put out. At my place in Scotland, there's a barn and one evening we came out in the twilight because there was a lot of screeching and a lot of noise, which was uncharacteristic. There were two barn owls on the roof of the barn and they had four or five youngsters with them, which were all crying out for food. The two owls were taking it in turns to bring food for the youngsters. That was absolutely magical.

The rural issue that most annoys me is inappropriate housing development. If people need houses, then absolutely we must have houses, it's iniquitous that we don't. However, when those houses are provided, they must be provided with a view to our heritage. The suburbanisation of rural life infuriates and upsets me. You'll find woodlands where people have found their own ways through, their own walks, for hundreds of years, and suddenly they have gravel paths and signposts and car parks. The countryside becomes a theme park rather than something that just is, in and of itself.

I admire the work of the Campaign to Protect Rural England. Also, the World Wildlife Fund and most of the animal charities have some kind of spiritual sensitivity – they are aware of what we need, which is more than money.

Our filming schedule on *Inspector George Gently* is very intense. A typical day is probably 15 hours. There is very little time to explore the country, but sometimes we are on location and it's absolutely breathtaking. The Durham countryside has a beautiful atmosphere.

"If you're flying over rural areas, you're really looking at Britain the way it was 100 years ago"



The new series of the crime drama *Inspector George Gently* begins on BBC One in April



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